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SUMMER, 1943

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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

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SIDNEY ALEXANDER:

The White Boat

Ellie Mae ironed the last wrinkle out of the last shirt and sighed. Done, thank the Lord, the long day dusted and washed and folded away. She kicked the legs from under the ironing board and stood it in the closet. The late afternoon sun was slanting almost level through the windows, glowed red on the waxed mahogany desk, burst into green flowers on the broadloom.

Ellie hurried to the hall closet and slipped out of her smock. Five-thirty; now if she could only get out of the house before Mrs. Raymond returned. How that woman could talk! And the obligation of polite interest, the murmured acknowledgements, the yes ma'am, yes ma'am. Oh she wouldn't bother with the zipper, it never worked anyway. She grabbed the paper bag with the hand-me-down-shoes and started for the door. Then she remembered. She rushed back to the living room and snatched the two folded bills from under the baboon paper-weight. She was just reaching for the doorknob when Mrs. Raymond walked in.

"Hello Ellie!" she said, glancing quickly around, "My you're fast today."

"Yes ma'am."

"Sit down a minute." She went into her bedroom and the voice continued. "I meant to phone but I was stuck there under the dryer. You know, these hairdressers, they putter so. Anyway, I met Mrs. Meyers . . . ." The disk was interrupted by the splash of water. Ellie sat at the edge of the chair still clutching the paper-bag. Lord, lord, the electric clock showed twenty-two of six . . .

" . . . .so there I was with the whole affair dumped in my lap. Calling me at the last minute like that. Some people simply have no consideration."

She was coming in now: the white terry robe swollen with the figure, the sandy-gray hair rhythmically set. She grimaced at her teeth in the mirror.

"Four would be the best, I think. I'll have the dinner ready then, and you can start serving at once."

"What, ma'am?" Ellie said with a start. She had been staring at the clock.

"Good Heavens, Ellie! Don't you *ever* listen? My Mah-Jongg club'll be here again tomorrow. It's not really *my* turn but Mrs. Meyers said *her* girl is sick and no one else could take it. So what could I do?" She smiled benevolently. "Anyway, you'll make some extra money."

"Thank you, Mizz Raymond," Ellie murmured and got up to leave, "but I'm afraid I cain't do it."

"You what?"

"I cain't do it . . . I made other 'rangements fo' tomorrow."

"Good heavens, Ellie!" She plumped down on the sofa, petulant as a child. "Now what am I to do? Where am I to get a girl?"

"I'll get someone fo' you . ." Ellie began.

"Well, I never . . ." She flounced her shoulder impatiently, and then slowly, the incongruous pout melted away. "I suppose it *is* rather at the last minute, Ellie. But I'd rather have *you* than an outsider. After all, you've been with me for years. You know best how we want things."

"I appreciates that, ma'am, but . . ."

"Oh break your date, whoever he is!"

"It ain't a he, ma'am," Ellie said, glancing at the clock in horror. "I really got to go now . . . I . . . I'll send another girl. Don't you worry. G'night, Mizz Ray."

"Ellie . . ." the voice scratched and clung like a claw.

"Yes ma'am?"

"I see you've got the shoes."

She turned slowly around.

"Yes ma'am. Ain't they fo' me?"

"Of course," Mrs. Raymond laughed. "I merely wondered if they'd fit all right."

"Oh they do fine, thanks, they don't need much fixin'."

Mrs. Raymond looked at the paper bag. "I wish you'd change your mind about tomorrow."

"That's impossible." If she don't stop, I'll throw the shoes in her face Ellie thought, I swear to God I will. What she tryin' to do?

"My, I've never seen you in such a hurry."

"Well ma'am, I got to be uptown by six-thirty. I got somethin' special . . ."

"You know, my dear, extra money doesn't grow on trees."

"I know that, ma'am."

"After all, I *did* take you off relief," the woman went on with exasperating deliberation. "I think I've been good enough to you. I haven't been a nag. And now, when I ask you for a special favor, just once, you can't do it. Really, Ellie, I'm surprised. I . . .I feel just a little hurt."

Behind the impassive brown face, the cords of anger tightened. She stood in the foyer by the door, saying nothing, the paper bag clasped to the cheap gingham dress.

"What's all this about tomorrow, anyway?"

"A pers'nal matter," Ellie said abruptly. She could tell her but why should she? What business was it of hers? I've got my own life to lead, she thought.

She reached out for the door knob, and added softly: "Please, Mizz Raymond. I don't want to lose my job. I cain't afford that. Any other time I be glad to work extra. But tomorrow I just cain't. Don't worry 'bout the party. I'll get someone experience'. I know lots o' girls . . ."

She looks like a pot ready to boil, Ellie thought, as she stepped cautiously out the door.

The Odd Fellows Hall was crowded as a subway station when she got there. They were milling around the cashier's window and the perspiring clerk was shouting: "No, they's all gone! Now will y'all *please* get out!" Ellie shoved her way to the window and waved a dollar bill frantically in Charley Walker's face. He spotted her and reached into the drawer.

"Lucky fo' you," he said, sliding the tickets under the grill. "Ah could've sold 'em ten times ovah. Ah said to myself, ef she don' show up in five mo' minutes, Ah sells 'em—reserve or no reserve. *Man,* looks like ev'body's goin' on this yere ride!"

She grinned triumphantly and slipped the tickets in her purse. As she was shouldering her way out, several men shouted: "How much y'askin' foh 'em sistuh? . . . Ah gives yuh two-fifty, what d'yuh say? . . ."

She shrank away from their smiling familiarity and, with her lips set primly, broke through the crowd and out into Lenox Avenue. It had been a stifling day but now the sun had gone down and the street lay in the shade like a swimmer under water. The gray monotonous barracks of the tenements had emptied out, and before every hallway and store little groups were clustered. Ellie heard their voices—talking about the weather and the ballgames, relief and rent and war and the Brown Bomber and the price of butter. She liked to walk on Lenox Avenue; it was a dancing happy street, and now it just suited her mood. The voices all about her were soft and comforting as a familiar bed. She sank back into her own, and suddenly the thought of Mrs. Raymond came to her, like a spur.

She turned west on 137th street, hurrying with the task to be done. As she had expected, Clara's father was sitting on the camp chair on the stoop, his crutches up against the building wall. He was chatting with the janitor.

"Hello, Ellie Mae!" the old man greeted her.

"Hello, Mist' Adams. How y'all feelin today?"

"Purty good thank yuh. This hot weathuh's good fo' th' arthritis."

"Yeah . . ." She glanced around the street. "Daughter Clara round?"

"Naw. She be back fo' suppuh. Ain't no fit company, anyhow. She's boilin' mad. Waited all mohnin' over t' Odd Fellows 'n then told they was no mo' tickets."

"I've got mine," Ellie couldn't help announcing.

"Me too," the janitor put in, grinning so widely that his spotted gums showed.

"Y' all's lucky." He sighed and shook his old head. "She wanted to go real bad. She sick'n tired hanging round. Gits on a young gal's nerves. *Ah* don't care, Ah cain't go anyway. Not with these laigs," he added, patting his thighs.

"They's some kinda rumor floatin' round," the janitor said, " 'bout phony tickets bein' sold."

"I don't know nothin' 'bout that," Ellie said grimly. "I paid good American money fo' mine."

"Well, phony or no phony," the janitor went on, "ain't *nobody* gonna keep me offa that boat. No *suh!* I ain't been on a ride fo' years. Ef the ticket is phony, that's *their* lookout."

He went down the cellar steps and as he disappeared, the old man turned to her with a pleading expression: "Ellie Mae, kin yuh spare a coupla dollahs? Clara spent our last relief fo' duh food stamps, 'n now they done turn out duh gas. We gets our nex' check duh fifteenth. We kin pay yuh then."

"I'm sorry," Ellie explained gently, putting her hand on his shoulder. She could feel his sharp bone through the shirt. "I've been puttin' a little aside each week fo' the tickets. That's how come I got 'em. Only paid the last installment just now. But I tell you what," she added quickly as he frowned. "That's why I came over. I got a job fo' Clara fo' tomorrow. That is, if she's free . . ."

"Oh she's free all right. She's boilin' mad because she's so free."

"Well, here's the address," Ellie said, writing it on the back of an envelope. "Tell her to be there promptly at fo' She's a crab, this Mizz Raymond, but she pays good."

He took the envelope and nodded.

"So long, Mist' Adams."

"So long, Ellie Mae."

"Have a good time!" he shouted after her, waving his crutch. "What? . . . Yeah, Ah tells her . . . promptly at fo' . . ."

She was humming a little tune as she approached the house, her mind clean and ordered now as the apartment she had toiled in all day. Tonight she and Ruby would make sandwiches and wrap them in wax paper. Hard boiled eggs and fried chicken and tuna. Yeah, the kids better

get to bed by nine, she thought. Then they could all get down to the pier bright and early. The best seats were at the bow. No wind. Port and aft, she thought, I wonder what it means. Port like wine. Oh it would be fun all right: her legs stretched out on the deck chair, sun on her face and the green land sliding by . . .

The brakes squealed like a woman in pain and she spun around and saw a cluster of skinny brown legs scattering in all directions. The truck driver's red face was stuck out of the cab and he was shouting: "Yuh goddam kids! Why don't yuh watch what yer doin'?" From stoops and hallways came jeers and whistles. Ellie Mae saw a small boy leaping like a monkey on the brownstone stoop, taunting the truck driver. She walked over and slapped the boy's face.

"Aw ma, what'sa big idea?"

"G'wan upstairs!" she said. "I told you not to play with these hoodlums."

More whistles and hoots, this time directed at her. "Roy, Roy, th' momma's boy! Yaaah! Yaah!" A rotten potato whistled past her head.

"Now git away from here, yuh no-good niggers," she shouted, "or I'll slap the bottoms of every one of yuh!" She pushed Roy ahead of her, into the house.

"Where's yo' cousins?" she asked.

"I don't know," Roy said angrily.

"What yuh mean yuh don't know? Weren't they home when you came back from school?"

"Aw, I don't know where they is."

"How many times I tell yuh to play in the playground, not in the street?"

"Playground's too far."

The wooden steps creaked and in the blackness of the hall they felt the sullen anger shrouding them, keeping them apart. Ellie heard the boy sniffling. She felt around for the lock, pushed open the door and switched on the light. Roy went over to the open dumb waiter shaft and started fiddling with the ropes.

"Keep away from there!" she said sharply. "You wanna fall down and break yo' neck!"

"Aw, jeez, I cain't do *nothin'* round here."

She looked at his face and suddenly felt sorry at this bitter homecoming. She put her arm around his shoulder and added gently: "Tain't that, son. I don't want you to get hurt, that's all. That's why I don't want you to play in the street. That's why I want you to stay with Ronnie 'n Lucy."

"What I gonna do with girls?" he replied, roughly pulling his shoulder out of her embrace. "What you want me to do? Play dolls till you'n Aunt Ruby come back? 'Sides," he added maliciously, "they don't stay home either."

"What do you mean?"

"Aw nothin'. Ast them."

"Well, never mind. Go in an' wash yo' face."

What they up to now? she thought angrily as she was setting the table. Slidin' down the same hill as they mother? It's easy enough fo' the men. Have a good time an' leave. Leave you with the misery . . . She remembered Abram, the way he used to laugh. Yeah, an' what I got now? Never sent a dime fo' the boy. If I ever find him . . . An' that no-count bum of Ruby's. They all alike. I got to talk to Ruby 'bout the girls. What good that do, though? Ruby ain' got no sense, never did have.

Now, where's the butter at? You'd think those girls be grown up enough to help a little. Looka the place. Didn't even make the beds. Lord, what I suppose to do—work all day cleanin' other people's houses 'n then come home 'n clean my own?

She heard them stomping up the stairs in unison. Hip hip, HOP, hip hip, HOP. They came bursting in the door giggling, their little budlike breasts shaking in the middy blouses.

"Lo, Aunt Ellie," Veronica said, kissing her on the cheek. Lucy was strutting back and forth before the boy lifting her knees high like a drum majorette, singing a march tune.

"Where you two been?"

"Oh auntie, don' be mad. They was a tryout over t' school for cheerleaders. Lucy's goin to be a major drum. Lookit 'er strut! BOOM BOOM BOOM! . . ."

"Good Lord, stop that racket! You wake up the dead! An' how many times I tell you to stay with Roy till we gets home? He mos' got killed 'count o' you."

Lucy looked at the boy and said: "He don' look dead to me. Hey Roy, you dead?" she added, tickling the back of his neck.

"Aw lemme alone!"

"Stop it, Lucy. Go in an' clean yo' room. An' you cut the bread. Yo' momma'll be home in a minute." She looked at the girls busy at their tasks, and relaxed. The boy was just bein' mean, that's all. They good girls. Cain't expect 'em to watch the boy every afternoon. They got young blood. Still, that truck . . .

She glanced at the girl working beside her at the table; the shining bronze-black hair, the warm flush of skin, the serious expression as she wielded the knife. She's pretty, Ellie thought, she looks like her mother, thank God, not like him. Ronnie started to whistle.

"Yo' mother know you got lipstick on?"

"She should know," the girl laughed. "She give it to me. Oh Auntie Ellie, you so old fashioned." She hugged her tightly. "Mmmm! We gonna have a time tomorrow!"

"Yeah . . . Lucy use it too?"

"What? Lipstick? Naw . . ." She flung her hair back. "She ain't

fifteen yet."

The door opened and Ruby slouched in, her hips working under the tight cheap coat. "Hy! Ellie Mae. Lo, Ronnie."

"Lo, momma," the girl said coolly and went on helping her aunt.

"Jeez, what a day," Ruby said, slipping off her hat and touching up her hair with a weary automatic gesture. "Damn subway." She flopped into a chair, stretched both legs out, examined their shape a moment, unhooked the wide copper studded belt and took the jangling brass spirals off her ears. "Stick they elbows eve'y which way. Cain't hardly breathe. Sweat all day in a laundry. Sweat home in a subway. Gawd . . . Lo, Lucy," she added, breaking out in a bright smile.

"Well, go git washed," Ellie said. "Supper's ready."

And now they all sat around their evening meal, dipping bread into the deep plates of reheated stew, and they talked about the small events that made up each one's day. Only Roy sat glumly until he heard his mother mention the boat-ride tickets, then suddenly he was jumping up and down in his chair . . .

"Whoo! Whoo! I'm comin' round the bend!"

"You gonna git bend right over my knee if you don't finish that stew."

Ruby laughed in her heavy way. "You ain't got no fun in yo' soul, Ellie. I sometimes wonder how you got him at all."

Ellie glared at her.

"I don't think it's fun to talk that way in front of children."

The two girls were hurriedly sopping up the stew. They glanced at each other over the spoons.

"You don't think *nothin's* fun."

A lot she knows, Ellie thought as she cleared away the dishes, she don't care 'bout nothin' but galavantin'. If it wasn't for the kids, I'd take a sleep-in job. But who I gonna leave 'em with, *her?*

"Coupla new fellahs at our place," Ruby said. "They really solid." She lit a cigarette and slowly exhaled the smoke through her nostrils. Lucy watched her with fascination. All her movements flowed as if there were only roundnesses in her life and no sharp edges.

"They both comin'," Ruby added slyly. "I dated one of 'em fo' you. He gotta good job so yo' betta be nice."

"Yeah, that's all I'm worryin' about," Ellie said, managing a laugh. She was always arguing with her sister, but tonight . . . tonight was different, she could even be tolerant of Ruby tonight. It was like the night before Christmas, or the night Abram marched in—all triumphant and smiles—and announced his new job on the docks. It was a prelude-night, the eve of intercession, the promise of a holiday.

"Is it a big boat, momma?" the boy asked suddenly. He had constructed a paper craft out of Ruby's newspaper, and he was steering it in and out of the dangerous shoals of plates and glasses, hoo-hooing at his cousins to get out of the way, he was coming, he was an ocean liner, he was a captain, he was a whale . . . And then the reality struck him and the toy

boat was forgotten, teetering at the edge of a white waterfall.

"Yeah," Ellie said indulgently.

"How big?"

"Oh maybe a block."

"Maybe two," Lucy said.

"Big enough to cross the ocean?"

"Two oceans maybe," Lucy said. "It's bigger'n Noah's ark."

Ruby laughed and stroked the boy's cheek. "Uh huh. They's two of each kind on it an' some left ovah." She winked at her sister. Lucy giggled.

"Anyways," Ellie said calmly as she gave Ronnie the waxed sheets and started to prepare the sandwiches, "It ain't as big as some people's mouths . . . Now let's get fixin' on the lunch. Y'all gotta be to bed by nine." And Lucy put on the eggs to boil, and Ronnie measured out the sheets and the boy retrieved his paper boat and was the sea captain again under the table. Ruby yawned and strolled into the bedroom. Ronnie watched her, suddenly serious, and when she had gone. . .

"Aunt Ellie. Why do you an' momma fight?"

"Who? Us? What you talkin' about? We don' fight." She handed her another slab of chicken and added less sharply: "I guess we tired, that's all, just plain tired."

The girl was silent for a while.

"Auntie."

"Yeah?"

"You ever been on a boat ride?"

A flush of memory broke through the clouds on the weary brown face. She half-smiled. "Yeah . . . A long time ago."

"I ain't never been."

"I know."

"I bet it's lots o' fun."

"Yeah, it's fun. Now go wrap yo' sneakers 'n middy blouse."

The girls were busy in the corner and now Ruby was in the room again, and when she looked up at her, she remembered the hurt note in Ronnie's voice, and she spoke gently: "Goin' out?"

"Uh huh. Got a date." She reddened her lips, clipped on the earrings, buckled the tight coat.

"I thought maybe you might help with the sandwiches," Ellie commented softly.

"Oh they ain't much," Ruby said. "You don't mind, do you honey? It's the fellah I told you about."

"You gonna see him tomorrow, ain't you?"

"Uh huh." The teeth flashed brightly under the fresh-rouged lips. "But that's *tomorrow*."

Yeah, that's tomorrow, Ellie thought when her sister had gone. I'm always waitin' fo' tomorrow and she . . . she takes it when it comes. I don't know, maybe she's right. Most tomorrows are the same . . . But no, she

thought . . . and the thought rose up and warmed her and dissolved the dank mist of her mood—some tomorrows are different . . . some tomorrows she would sail . . . yeah . . . some . . . yes . . .

"C'mon," Ronnie whispered to her sister, "You cut 'n I'll wrap. Aunty's fell asleep in her chair."

It was only a quarter to seven, but already there was a small crowd on the pier.

"You see," Ruby complained sleepily, "other people got the same idea."

"That's all right," Ellie said brightly. "They ain't many. Now let's get up front."

"Hey, lookit the boat, momma!" Roy shouted. "Lookit the big boat!" He broke away and raced to the wooden gate, peering through the slats like a prisoner at the sight of freedom.

"You better keep yo' eyes on him," Ellie instructed the girls, "or he's gonna fall in the river."

The pier was open at the sides without rails or guards. Over by one of the stanchions, a boy with a wide flat cap was swinging his bat at an imaginary ball. His girl applauded, her big yellow bonnet flapping like the sun-bathed wings of the gulls. People were trickling onto the pier, at first in twos and threes and then in larger groups until by seven the pier was almost half filled.

It was a typical excursion crowd, bright with many-colored garments in the morning, rippling with expectant laughter. And yet there was about it the special air of rarity, the eager festival-hunger in the eyes of chamber-maids and porters, the happiness grasped and gulped without measure. Everywhere they set their lunch boxes and thermos jugs, everywhere they pinched and danced, helloed, waved, dropped stones into the water. It was the day of furlough, of leave, in the lives of work-soldiers. The August sun was hot even at this hour, but the air was clear and the river lay in the early light like a slate-blue cape sparkling with rhinestones.

Ellie breathed deeply. She was content. The promise of the day ahead sparkled like the riverpath. Over on the Jersey shore she could see the roller coaster of the Palisades Amusement Park, and the apartment houses perched up on the cliffs, and the shimmering drops of sun that were cars climbing there. She piled her packages against the wooden railing, and through the slats looked at the white steamer slowly breathing on the water.

"What time they lettin' us on?" she asked a woman waiting beside her.

"Not till quarter of eight."

"Thanks." She mopped her forehead. It was getting very hot.

"Oh there they are!" Ruby suddenly exclaimed, and began to wave her arm. She had been watching all the newcomers. Two men spotted her and came dog-trotting up.

"Lo honey," she greeted the younger-looking of the two. He squeezed her hand and held it a moment.

"Ellie," she said happily, "this here's Randy Jackson. An' . . ."

"Charles McKenna," the other man announced in a deep plush voice. He extended his hand. "Glad to meet you, Miss Porter." He was very assured, very dignified, and her quick resentment was somehow mute against his manners. He certainly wasn't like his friend, Ellie thought, looking at the two of them laughing uproariously at some private joke; at least he acted like a gentleman. Even the boy seemed to take a shine to him and soon was clamoring to be lifted on his shoulders that he might look over the gate. And when Ellie saw the firm arms clasp her son and lift him, and the way the boy clung to McKenna's neck, she softened, and vague ideas like shadows on the river went floating through her mind. Yeah, everything was different today, even this man was not what she'd expected.

The crowd was filling in very rapidly now and people were pressing up behind them and against each other. The dock swarmed like a beehive in the holiday sun—the rainbow clusters, the package heaps, the happy voices, the metallic squeals of children weaving in and out. A young fellow had perched himelf upon a stanchion and was strumming on his guitar:

Honey, you the
Spangle an . . . .
the dingdong oh!

And the crowd was pressing against her again—it was a great impatient beast—and Ellie didn't even mind when her friend suggested that he take her arm and shield her somewhat with his shoulders. There was comfort there, and sanctuary, and she found herself dreaming along paths she had rejected; and the paths were sure, not overgrown with brambles and treacherous thorns, and before she realized it she was leaning hard against him and the path led to a meadow overgrown with flowers, and she tried to back away, suddenly angry at her impulse . . . It was soon time now and cries were heard: "It's gettin' late. Hey, open up the gate!" A group of boys took it up in unison: clapping their hands in rhythm like an impatient audience in a theatre.

Ellie heard an angry murmur behind her and then a sudden burst of laughter.

"What's happenin'?" she asked McKenna. They were packed in so, she couldn't twist around to see.

"Oh it's nothin'," he said craning his neck and looking back over the crowd. He sure tall, Ellie thought, bigger'n Abram even. "Some committeeman tryin' to get through," McKenna explained. He smiled broadly. "Uh uh . . . a kid's stolen his badge. He's mad all right. He's goin' back fo' a cop."

"Oh where's Roy?" she cried out, suddenly apprehensive. "Roy!"

"He's here, don't worry," Ronnie's voice came from somewhere.

"Well hold onto him. We goin' on soon."

"Yes *suh*!" Randy Jackson said.

Ellie could just make out her sister's salmon-colored turban bobbing in the molten mass at her left.

"Mm . . . what a day!"

"Hey! quit yo' shovin' . . ."

"Who's shovin'?"

Something hard pressed against her back. A policeman shouldered by. He was nudging ahead with his night stick, clearing a path for two very excited committeemen: their collars sweaty, their faces angry and worried. They announced something to the crowd but Ellie couldn't make it out in the babble of voices, and then the committeemen had passed and everyone was falling in behind them and shoving toward the gate. Voices screamed from the pier's edge: "Hey watch out! . . . You nearly pushed someone ina water!" Those at the edge were pressing toward the center of the dock, and those behind were pressing forward, and soon Ellie was gasping in the cross-current.

"Mist' McKenna!" she panted, clutching his arm. "What's goin' on? I cain't hardly breathe!"

"I don't know," he said seriously. "Everybody's gone crazy 'bout somethin'. Better hang onto me."

She was suddenly jolted forward. The crowd was boiling like a whirlpool around her. She heard a frienzied outcry and Randy Jackson's head bobbed up. He was flailing away at somebody and yelling, "Who the hell you think you kickin'?"

"Lemme go!" the man cried hysterically. "I gonter get on the boat! Nobody gonna rob me!"

"Aw, pipe down man."

"Hey, break it up."

"What's the matter, Randy?" McKenna asked, shouldering his way to the fight.

"Aw, this guy start kickin'. Fraid he wouldn't get on. Seems like some phony tickets been sold. They gonna examine all the tickets."

"Hey! They gonna examine all the tickets!"

"Somebody's out o' luck."

"Well, it ain't gonna be *me*!"

"Me neither . . . "

"Yeah . . . "

Frantically, Ellie clawed open her handbag and felt for the tickets. Oh, they were there all right, and they were good, she told herself, they must be good, they were *her* tickets, she had slaved for them, sweated for them, they were her magic pass for one day of freedom. She looked around hysterically as the word spread among the people, spread like a prairie fire feeding on the dry stalks of their lives, their denial, their anger.

And as she surged forward in the flame she heard within herself a confused voice shouting like the madness without: "Who they think they is? Who they think they is?" And she was not clear whom the "they" referred

to, but it was there, it was always there, that overhanging "they," that threat that would deprive her of her holiday. Frenzied, she kicked and scrambled toward the magic gate but when she got there a policeman was braced against it, his badge glittering coldly in the sun, his arms outstretched against the crowd:

"Now take it easy everybody! Stand back! We're just gonna check the tickets, that's all! Everybody with legitimate tickets will get on!"

He turned his lobster-red face to a committeeman, and Ellie saw that it was Charlie Walker, the sweat streaming down his cheeks, his shoulders moving grotesquely as he kept jerking away from the many-handed crowd.

"Mist' Walker! Mist' Walker!" Ellie shouted, edging forward and thrusting her tickets in his face. "You sold me these tickets! They's good, ain't they? You sold 'em to me!"

"Wait a minute!" he said. "We gotta take 'em one at a time!" Another committeeman came up and whispered in his ear. Walker nodded his head, went through the gate, and started running up the landing to the boat. Helplessly, Ellie looked at him until he had disappeared and then she turned pleadingly to the other committeeman but he was too busy checking the tickets. The policeman shoved her back into line. And then from nowhere she heard Roy screaming, "Momma! Momma!" and she turned around to get at him but didn't know where to look. Everywhere children were being trampled under their elders' feet. She could just make out the heads of Ruby and the girls tossing at her left like corks in a storm. "Roy!" she screamed in anguish, "Roooooooy!"

"Take it easy," McKenna's rich voice sounded behind her. "I've got the kid." Roy was perched like a frog on his shoulders, the tears streaming down his cheeks. He saw his mother and began to wail even louder.

"It's all right, son" Ellie said, soothingly. "We all be on the boat soon."

Several more had been passed by the committeeman and Ellie could see them running on the landing beyond as if they had escaped from a stampede. And now the committeeman was looking at her tickets too, and he was shaking his head and saying:

"Sorry, Miss. These here's phonies."

"They cain't be!" Ellie shouted, "I bought 'em myself only yesterday at the lodge. Mist' Walker sold 'em to me himself!"

He looked at her uncomprehendingly.

"Ah don' know nothin' 'bout that," he said. "They was tickets sold all over Harlem. We can't get 'em *all* on this boat."

"But Mist' Walker . . . "

"Well, he ain't here now, lady. So you just have to stand ovah there an' wait. Nex'."

Ellie stared at him dumbly. Her hair had fallen over her eyes. She stood there swaying, breathing hard, bracing herself against the gatepost. She felt the huge anonymous pressure urging behind her. And then a string snapped and she grabbed the committeeman by the lapel, and she was screaming: "Yuh dirty rotten crook! Y'ain' gonna keep my kids offa

this boat! Nobody's gonna keep us off what we're entitled to!"

"Take yo' hands off me!" the committeeman said, shaking himself loose. "We not keepin' you off. Yo' jus' gotta wait here a little while till Walker gits back."

"Well, I ain't gonna wait!" Ellie cried. "All my life I been waitin'. I ain't gonna wait no mo'. We're goin' on that boat right now!"

"Stand back!" the policeman yelled, but now the crowd had exploded into a thousand angry shouts: "Quit holdin' her up! . . . Let her on! . . . Let *ev'body* on! . . . C'mon, damn yuh, open it up!" . . . The policeman saw their faces and he pulled his gun and shot it into the air. From a distance came the wail of a siren.

"Yuh better open up that gate or somebody get hurt," McKenna shouted.

"Don't tell me what to do, yuh goddam nigger bastard!" the cop replied. And then the fight began. Fruit flying in all directions. People slipping on bananas and tomato skins. A woman's hysterical laughter. Boys shinnying over the fence. The policeman's whistle over and over again. And Ronny tugging at her sleeve and crying, "Aunty! Aunty! What we gonna do?"

Oh what happened to her lovely day? The white boat floated ironically in the sunshine. Now it was seen and now again lost as the fury milled about her and drove her from the gate. And Ellie Mae forgot the boy, forgot McKenna and the green shoots of promise, oh she only knew that she must get on that boat, and with her arms stretched before her she moved through the pandemonium like a sleepwalker following a vision. Now she had come to the policeman again and he yelled at her to stop but she did not hear him, and darkest night and a thousand shrieking stars crashed into the citadel of her skull, and the white boat abruptly disappeared as she fell to the dock, the blood spurting from her mouth, the black tide swirling on and over the silent dreamless head.

R. P. BLACKMUR:

*Language as Gesture**

If there is a puzzle in my title, it is because, like Sweeney with his ladies in Eliot's *Fragment of an Agon,* "I've gotta use words when I talk to you." The puzzle is verbal, something we have made ourselves, and may be solved. Language is made of words, and gesture is made of motion. There is one half the puzzle. The other half is equally self-evident if only because it is an equally familiar part of the baggage of our thought. It is the same statement put the other way round. Words are made of motion, made of action or response, at whatever remove; and gesture is made of language—made of the language beneath or beyond or alongside of the language of words. When the language of words fails we resort to the language of gesture. If we stop there, we stop with the puzzle. If we go on, and say that when the language of words most succeeds it *becomes* gesture in its words, we shall have solved the verbal puzzle with which we began by discovering one approach to the central or dead end mystery of meaningful expression in the language of the arts. We shall have made, too, I take it, an imaginative equivalent for Kenneth Burke's more nearly intellectual thesis, which I share, that the language of poetry may be regarded as symbolic action. The difference between Mr. Burke and myself is that where he is predominantly concerned with setting up methods for analyzing the actions as they are expressed in the symbol, I choose to emphasize the created or dead-end symbol. He explores the puzzle of the language in the process of becoming symbolic. I try to show in a series of varied and progressive examples how the symbol invests the actions in language with poetic actuality. Mr. Burke legislates; I would judge; the executive is between us.

There is a line in *Othello* which I think makes it all plain between us, not just between Mr. Burke and myself, but between all of us. "I understand a fury in your words / But not the words." I do not propose this language as itself a gesture, but it is proposed as a fair example of the situation in which language gains the force of gesture; and indeed it leads to the memory of my own earliest experience of language as gesture. As a small boy of six or seven walking the streets of Cambridge I used often to pass little dead-end streets, each with its sign post which at its top read, say, Trowbridge Place or Irving Terrace, and underneath in letters of a different colour and on a separate board, the following mysterious legend: Private Way Dangerous Passing. The legend meant of course merely that the City of Cambridge, since it neither built nor maintained the roadbed of this place or this terrace, would not be responsible for injury to life or property sustained though its use. But to me it meant something else. It meant that there was in passing across

* One of the Mesures Lectures for 1942 at Princeton University.

its mouth a clear and present danger which might, and especially if it was dusk, suddenly leap out and overcome me. Thus, to say the least of it, I had the regular experience of that heightened, that excited sense of being which we find in poetry, whenever I passed one of those signs. I understood the fury in its words, but not the words. Yet I am not sure at this late and dejected day that in understanding the words I have not become indifferent to a fury of meaning that was actually there. There was a steady over-arching gesture in those words, Dangerous Passing, which because I was included within it and indeed partly created it, meant more and touched me more deeply than any merely communicative words, deprived of their native gesture, can ever do.

For gesture *is* native to language, and if you cut it out you cut roots and get a sapless and gradually a rotting if indeed not a petrifying language. (If I may quote a poem of my own in which there was some effort to make an image for standing dead timber, what in Maine we call dri-kai, "Ghostly, these gestures are beyond repair.") But gesture is not only native to language, it comes before it in a still richer sense, and must be, as it were, carried into it whenever the context is imaginative. Living in Belmont some ten years ago I used to go in to Cambridge on an orange-yellow bus which made very good time the first half of the trip. If anyone were ahead of you getting on, you might jump from ten to twenty to forty or fifty miles an hour by the time you had paid your fare and found your seat. So it was for the woman I remember one very high bright noon. She got on with a friend whom I do not remember at all except that she sat directly behind me and no doubt looked over my shoulder seeing just what I saw. But the woman herself I remember very well. She was largish and of a French figure, that is with a noticeable waist and a more noticeable rear, and she had heels too high for her balance in a spurting bus. There she stood holding the chromium rail back of the driver's seat looking at her friend (and therefore at me) while the driver made her change. She fair yawed to leeward every few yards, each time knocking the great floppy hat, which women of such figure so often wear askew, against the upright post on which the coin box was set. She had much trouble getting the two fares in the box, and considerably more trouble getting herself from the box down the aisle, hauling from seat to seat by their shining handles against the momentum of the bus, lurching, as she had to, in all directions save the right one. During the whole business —and this is what I am getting at—she managed by sniffs and snorts, by smiles, by sticking her tongue out very sharp, by batting her very blue eyes about, and generally by cocking her head this way and that, she managed to express fully, and without a single word either uttered or wanted, the whole mixed, flourishing sense of her disconcertment, her discomforture, her uncertainty, together with a sense of adventure and of gaiety, all of which she wanted to share with her companion behind me, who took it I was sure, as I did myself, all smiles. Because I was within the orbit of her gestures I felt myself, as I felt her, fairly playing in life

as we say that water-lights play in the sun or moon.

That is an example of the gesture that comes before language; but reflecting upon it, it seems also an example of the gesture which when it goes with language crowns it, and so animates it as to make it independent of speaker or writer; reflecting upon it, it seems that the highest use of language cannot be made without incorporating some such quality of gesture within it. How without it could the novelist make his dialogue ring? how could the poet make his cry lyric, his incongruity comic, or his perspective tragic? The great part of our knowledge of life and of nature—perhaps all our knowledge of their play and interplay—comes to us as gesture, and we are masters of the skill of that knowledge before we can ever make a rhyme or a pun, or even a simple sentence. Nor can we master language purposefully without re-mastering gesture within it. Gesture, in language, is the outward and dramatic play of inward and imaged meaning. It is that play of meaningfulness among words which cannot be defined in the formulas in the dictionary, but which is defined in their use together; gesture is that meaningfulness which is moving, in every sense of that word: what moves the words and what moves us.

Before pursuing the means of access to the mystery of gesture in the art of poetry, let us see quickly how it behaves among the other arts. For if gesture is of such structural importance in poetry as I claim for it, then the other arts should attest for it an equivalent importance; it is in such matters that there must be a substantial unity in all art; there are not two, or three, much less seven, fundamental modes of imagination, but only one. We must use example, not argument, for we wish to remind ourselves not of formulas but of insights, and we wish to get back to poetry with our sense of gesture fortified rather than obstructed.

The clearest and most familiar example of gesture in architecture is the spire on a church, for we have all seen church spires whether we go to church or not. Bad spires weigh a church down and are an affair of carpentry rather than architecture, an example of formula stifling form. A good spire is weightless, springing, an arrow aimed at the Almighty, carrying, in its gesture, the whole church with it. Though it may have been as much made out of formula as the bad spire, it differs in that the formula has somehow seized enough life to become form again; which is one way of saying what gesture does in art—it is what happens to a form when it becomes identical with its subject. It does this, in the case of a spire, by giving the sense of movement, of aspiration, as a tree or a shrub gives the sense of process of growth, or as a beautiful room gives the effect of extending space rather than enclosing it. This sense of movement in "actually" inert mass and empty space is what we call gesture in architecture. So, too, we feel that pillars are mighty, that a bridge spans or leaps, that a dome covers us, or a crypt appals us.

In sculpture we have much the same situation as in architecture except that the effects are more specifically human in character; for in sculpture we arrest or fix in physical mass and space those human or

animal movements, or those essential shapes of body or object, which, arrested, move within themselves, whether from inwards outwards or outwards inwards, so as to make a timeless gesture. Here we get the difference between gesture and act. In bad sculpture, what bores us and annoys us and makes us feel that we are bumping our heads against stones, is the sense that the athlete wants to leap or that the horse is about to canter, or whatever it is; the arrested movement wants to go on and complete itself in action. In good sculpture there is none of this, but rather that in the movement arrested, in the moving stillness, there is a gesture completed at the moment of its greatest significance. Examples in sculpture are easy, as in architecture, but less conspicuous. A good vase shows all the gesture value of roundness; a good nude by Maillol or Lehmbruck or LaChaise gives a deep gesture of the body in some moment of meaningful balance. Let us say that good sculpture has a heaviness or lightness which has nothing to do with stone or wood or the carver's trade, but which has everything to do with the gesture which illumines the medium. It is gesture that makes a stone figure a sphinx, and it is gesture that makes the great Sphinx a smile. By which I mean that there is great momentum in great repose and inexhaustible meaningfulness in any image that makes the gesture, as the sphinx does, of the momentum and the repose in man's brooding upon himself. Sculpture is man breeding shapes out of his brooding.

Painting may combine the effect of the gestures in both sculpture and architecture, since it represents the feeling of physical mass and space, but it does so at a remove. The true play of meaning in painting lies rather in what it does with texture, with light, and especially with what it does with our great, and otherwise ineluctable, visual knowledge of human character. No knowledge is so great or so skilled and no knowledge has been so variously felt as our knowledge of what, literally, we *see* in people. But in our knowledges there is none, too, in which we so fumble when we try to say what we know as in this visual knowledge, except when we use the mode of imaginative painting in the field of the portrait or of figure painting. I think, to reach for things at hand, of Rembrandt's Polish Rider, in the Frick Galleries, with all its golden gloom and the light gathering against the rider's face, or in the same galleries of Titian's young man in ermine alive in old air—both so full of that maximum human dignity, that rightness and fullness of being, of which no man, seen, can be deprived. Or again there are the portraits of El Greco, brimming, as Marianne Moore's poem says, with inner light—the portrait of the Cardinal in the Metropolitan or that of Brother Felix in the Boston Museum; haunted faces both, haunted with that spiritual life beyond dignity which the flesh cannot ever attain in fact but which is sometimes reached as a gesture of light in eyes and features. How does a painter come by such effects? Look at a society portrait, a prettified portrait, an official portrait—all faithful enough to their sitters, all too faithful, precisely—and is it not plain that their great lack, their yawning vacuity,

the almost visible yawn of suppressed inattention, comes about because the painter has rendered them as the average of a long series of unresponsive moments. Nothing is left out but the vital gesture of the single, focal moment, the gesture of some particular state, some long perspective—say the lifelong heaviness of the head upon its little fulcrum—some deep inspiration of the flesh, say the desire *in weariness* for rest, or even, say, just the gaiety and radiance of the features in play with life; nothing is left out but what the great portrait painter puts in: some caught or imagined gesture of awareness that startles the features into a maximum life. The painter puts into his portraits the crossed gesture of knowledge and mystery, of the intolerably familiar and the impossibly alien, which we see in the looking-glass. That is why in great portraits we see ourselves.

In dancing we would seem to have the art that is most directly concerned with gesture, for when the gesture breaks down or does not communicate, the dance does not speak at all. Put the other way around, this means that the gesture in ballet must be built up and infused into what is otherwise "mere" movement. Gesture is what makes dancing buoyant and what makes it possible for it to end. Without gesture there cannot be a beginning or a middle or an end to a dance. Gesture is the means through which the movements of the dance complete themselves, and for these movements to become gesture they usually require ritual (as in the Mass), or music (as in the ballet) for both source and background. I think of a rehearsal of one of the ballets based on Mozart where all was dead cluttering movement until Balanchine, by his single example, brought the movements into tune with the music and so made them suddenly into gesture. Again to revert to the Mass, we have the nature of the ritual itself (consecration, sacrifice, communion) determining the scope of the gesture, and on the other hand we reflect that it is the gesture (the posture of prayer, the elevation of the host, the service of the cup and wafer) which transforms the "mere" movements into ritual. Gesture is perhaps the stable *and* moving element in ritual; it is both what is autochthonous—reborn out of the native soil of feeling—and what is autonomous—and independently controls the meaningfulness in ritual. Still again, and not actually far afield, there is Nijinski's remark that it is the costumes of a ballet that determine what the gestures shall be, as the cut of one's cloth determines one's stride; but it is in turn the gestures of the dancers that bring the costumes, or the nakedness, of the bodies to life. Dancing *delivers* gestures otherwise conceived. It is the natural wayward play of the body, controlled.

Control is the key word with regard to gesture in acting, too, and in much the same senses as in dancing; it is the purposive, conventional control of the body's movements that produces meaningful gesture. Or perhaps we should say that it is a kind of reduction, condensation, telescoping, of free instinctive movements that transforms them into residual gestures, almost as closely ordained as the gestures in ritual. Historically, we can remind ourselves, what we call play-acting came out of dumb-show.

which was conventionalized mimicry—in short, mummery. Mummery is what the actor calls on apart from his lines when he is making appropriate gestures, and what he calls on in spite of his lines when he is making bad gestures. Of course, as a matter of practice we seldom get familiar enough with a particular version of even a play of Shakespeare to be able a great span of gesture. Our nearest approach is with a good actor making the best out of bad lines, an affair which, unless we are ourselves mummers, we enjoy apologetically. I recall once having seen Tolstoi's *Living Corpse,* a play which I had not read, produced in German, a lan- to divorce the mummery of it from the lines, but if we could I think we should find that mummery alone is an extraordinary resourceful and complex art, using the full personality of the actor, rising often through guage I do not know, with the lead acted by Alessandro Moissi, an actor with whose reputation I was at that time unfamiliar, and in conditions that were hardly propitious: with a straggling handful for audience in the great barn of the Boston Opera House. Yet the experience of the evening proved the case far more than seeing Bernhardt or Duse or Mantell or the Barrymores ever did. For what I saw and heard was nothing but the mummer at his work with movement and posture and voice; the words of the play were transparencies used to time and to bound the acting. What the mere words were, it seemed to me, must have been rubbish; they were so little needed in the face of the fast conventions of voice and movement, conventions that must have been universal to western man since I understood them so well, through which Moissi worked from beauty to lucid beauty of created gesture. The gamut of the actor showed as great as that of any art just because my attention was fastened upon it by being excluded from anything else Yet I knew at the time that what I felt was good for training short of complete experience; I felt the effect of supreme control without feeling all the controlling force. I missed what the lines of the play called upon Moissi to create; but at least I learned why poor actors ruin the best plays: they have not the knowledge within them which can be called into play. How can a man understand the play of light who has not felt the sun aching in his bones? And how, similarly, can an actor understand the play of words unless they seem to rise and set within him as his own meaning? Great acting bodies forth the gestures only of great words: no more.

It is music that of all the arts does more. Like pure acting its medium may be thought of as entirely in time as time is filled with sound. It is purer than acting because all its movement is movement of sound. But its greatest purity lies in the fact that, although other arts may use some of its effects, it alone of the arts can proceed according to its own purpose without either anterior or subsequent obligation to any other art. Roger Sessions, in the essay which he contributed to *The Intent of the Artist,* says that the purpose of music is to create gestures of the human spirit, and as my argument is on this point only a lesser version of his I refer you to it for the completion and confirmation of my own. But I will

say this. I do not know what constitutes the discipline of music from a composer's point of view, except that I am sure it is severe, yet I feel as a layman that the freedom which that discipline secures is the freedom of repetition, of development, of variation within or upon or around a theme to an extent which in any other major art would be not only ineffectual but boring: the freedom, in short, to play with the elements of musical meaning until they become gesture. This is no doubt why Pater said that all the arts tend to the condition of music; the condition is gesture. The rest of music is but the means for the delivery of gesture, and for the artist who rejoices at all in his work that is the most blessed circumstance possible to imagine. It is tantamount to saying that his means—his technique—may become almost the whole object of attention, both for himself and for his audience. It is not his theme, once he has it, but what happens to his theme, that counts; and what happens to it will be precisely and immitigably what he does within his means. His form and his substance will be united in process as well as at the end: united as gesture. No wonder we are happy when we sing and sing when we are sad. The other arts take us in parts, and give us roles to play with ourselves looking on; music takes us all round, gesture without remove.

So with gesture in the six arts of which poetry is surely the natural child, as it shows variously the stigmata of all six and yet makes a fiery gesture all its own. It is the gesture, I like to think, of poetic judgment, the judgment of all the gestures, all the play of meaning, which makes up full being. Poetry is the meaning of meaning, or at least the prophecy of it. "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled." In these words of Isaiah there is a motto for poetry, a judgment of poetry, and a poetic gesture which carries the prophetic meaning of poetry. The words sound with music, make images which are visual, seem solid like sculpture and spacious like architecture, repeat themselves like the movements in a dance, call for a kind of mummery in the voice when read, and turn upon themselves like nothing but the written word. Yet it is the fury in the words which we understand, and not the words themselves. Let them serve as text for the rest of these remarks; for with them to buoy us up we can start on as low a level as we like.

That is the level of the writer who finds himself inarticulate because, as he thinks, the words in his pen are not as viable as the words in his mouth. He says in explanation of why he cannot write—at least one such writer said to me not long ago—"The trouble is I don't have the benefit of gesture in writing—or of inflection either." He is wrong; his trouble is that he has put himself in the position of the stenographer, and what he wants is what the stenographer cannot take down—on the one hand rhythm and cadence and interval, the gestures of the voice that speaks, and on the other hand the look and feel and movement of the man while speaking, whatever is necessary to render what we may call the whole gesture of the scene. What he has to do is to forget the whole theory

of stenography or reporting and make the words of his pen do not only what the words of his mouth did, but also, and most of all, what they failed to do at those crucial moments when he went off into physical gesture with face and hands and vocal gesture in shifting inflections. And he must do this by making his written words sound in the inward ear of his reader, and so play upon each other by concert and opposition and pattern that they not only drag after them the gestures of life but produce a new gesture of their own. To make words play upon each other both in small units and large is one version of the whole technique of imaginative writing. Since what is being played with is meanings and congeries of meanings, what is wanted cannot be articulated in a formula, but on the other hand it cannot be articulated at all except when delivered within a form. The point is that contrary to the general view there are relatively few formulas and relatively many forms; exactly as many as there are gestures to require them; and for forms there are many rules of thumb. Let us look at a few where the means are small enough to handle.

In a sense any word or congeries of words can be pushed to the condition of gesture either by simple repetition or by a combination of repetition and varied preparation. Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," or Lear's "Never never never never never," would seem good immediate examples of simple repetition metamorphosing the most familiar words into the most engulfing gesture. To emphasize what has happened in these lines, and to indicate how words sometimes get out of mere verbal meaning when they become gesture, it may be suggested that Macbeth might have said Today and today and today, and Lear said, Always always always always always, and much the same effect have transpired in either case. It is not at all the meaning the words *had* that counts, but the meaning that repetition, in a given situation, makes them take on. The repetition of the word "will" in the will sonnets, and also all the words that rhyme with will, does much the same thing; the resultant meaning has nothing to do with will, but is an obsessive gesture of Shakespeare the man himself, made out of the single iterated syllable intensified into a half-throttled cry.

A more complex and quite different type of repetition offers itself in Iago's exhortation to Roderigo to leave off thinking of suicide and take up thinking again of Desdemona. I truncate the passage somewhat for the production purposes of these remarks.

> "Put money in thy purse; follow thou the wars; defeat thy favour with an usurped beard; I say, put money in thy purse. It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor—put money in thy purse—nor he his to her: it was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration; put money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills:—fill thy purse with money . . . . She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice: she must have change, she must: therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money thou canst: if sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian be not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of Hell, thou shalt enjoy her; therefore make money." . . . .
>
> Roderigo questions him. "Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue?" and Iago resumes his charge.

"Thou are sure of me: go, make money: I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor: my cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason . . . . There are many events in the womb of time, which will be delivered. Traverse; go; provide thy money."

Roderigo as he makes his exit says, "I am changed: I'll go sell all my land," and looking after him Iago begins, "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse."

So we see poor Roderigo bought and sold, bought cheap and sold dear, put on change and quite sold out, half a dozen ways at once, and always in terms of the iterated and focussing phrase, "Put money in thy purse," and the changes rung upon it. Roderigo is indeed a changed man in every sense of the word, and the dark, unclean, unconscious, equivocal nature of that change is made clearer and clearer, brought to a light of its own by Iago's phrase. Unlike the simple syllabic repetitions of Lear and Macbeth, Iago's phrase could not be altered without altering the gesture; it is rather that the material that comes between the different iterations could have been altered to almost anything else providing only that they followed the same general line. As Kenneth Burke remarked, money is a neutral symbol capable of bringing meaningful action into any situation. Money is in this situation the symbol of stored evil, and by rehearsing it Shakespeare has released the gesture of the evil.

In Hamlet's best-known soliloquy there is a passage in which the repetition of two words similarly draws upon the reservoir of chthonic meaning but with a different effect upon the words themselves:

To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream; aye, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

Here it is the context that determines the meaningfulness that the words *die* and *sleep* and their variants take on in the process of becoming gesture; but once determined, that meaningfulness, that over-arching gesture, carries on through the rest of the soliloquy and beyond, into Hamlet's answer to Ophelia's query how he is: "I humbly thank you: well, well, well," which as gesture moves us to other than the literal sense. It is all the ill of doubt and trepidation before the unknown prospect which the words "to die: to sleep" release as gesture, which in turn infect the triple, mutilating repetition: "Well, well, well."

But we should put this playing upon the meanings of sleep and death over against another kind of playing, this time from *Macbeth*, on the same words, where all the repetition comes at the beginning and is only implied in the played upon sense, through the rest of the passage.

Methought I hear a voice cry, "Sleep no more
Macbeth does murder sleep!" the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

Where Hamlet's play of gesture was towards condensation, a focussing of the gesture into action, a gesture invading the very plot of the play itself, in the lines from *Macbeth* the context only suggests the gesture and provides it a means to invoke an escape from the context of the action, and sets it, in its little freed world of words, to creating other gestures in the last four phrases, which themselves both play upon each other and all backwards upon sleep. Sore labour plays upon hurt minds, and great nature's second course (meaning a second round or lap in the sense of movement) plays upon the other sense of *course* in connection with life's feast, and life's feast plays directly back upon the death of each day's life: itself sleep, which has already been murdered by Macbeth. What we have here is part prayer and part imprecation, with gesture invoking its substance: the substance of what is lacking and cannot, except in the form of prayer, be had.

What these two passages do in common—and it is their most remarkable deed—is by the power of discovered or invoked gesture to transform the simple name of sleep into a rich and complex symbol. In a large way we are familiar with such metamorphoses in the titles of poems or plays or in the names of great imaginative figures, or, sometimes—though very rarely—in the names of particular authors and artists. All the gestures in *Hamlet* combine to make a symbol which has become, with each fresh use, the more inexhaustible and the more complex; so much that we do not need to ask, when we say Hamlet, whether we mean the play as a whole or the figure of a man resolving the agony of doubt in gestures. So with Macbeth and Anna Karenina and Raskolnikoff and Don Quixote; and so too with Villon and Dante and Michael Angelo and Plato and Baudelaire and Poe. It is the same operation in a small way that we have been watching in the two passages about sleep: the creation of symbols. A symbol, I take it, is what we use to express meaningfulness in a permanent way which cannot be expressed in direct words or formulas of words with any completeness; a symbol is a cumulus of meaning which, once established, attracts further meanings to it until, overloaded, it collapses. The making of symbols is a steady occupation for minds at all aware, and they are especially the objects in which meaning is shared and transmitted by those who have life in common, by lovers, friends, and that version of society which we think of as fellowship. Gestures are the first steps toward the making of symbol, and those symbols which endure are the residuary legatees of the meanings earned through gesture. Returning to our passages about sleep it is only the accident that they are a little too long to be said all at once that has kept them as gestures only, just as, on the same argument, it is their brevity more than their residual possibilities that has made actual symbols out of "The rest is silence," or "Ripeness is all," or "Flesh is grass," quite independent of their original contexts in *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Isaiah*.

Let us take next what at first appears an even smaller context of effort than the repetition of words or phrases, namely the effort to make

one word act like another, or several; that is, punning. Rhyme, which is the terminal form of punning, and alliteration, which is the initial form of punning, are the commonest uses of this mode of language and are of course the most effective to the widest audience, since they deal, on the surface, entirely with the sounds of the words played on: what we know without thought and cannot know better no matter how much thought we take. That rhyme and alliteration have other uses is not questioned; I merely want to emphasize how primitive and how pervasive is the pun in poetry. It is, taken in its fullest gamut as gesture (for any achieved pun is a gesture), the only direct avenue to undifferentiated sense that the poet has; it is what objectively joins the perceptions of the different senses together, heightening them into a single sensation. Not only that, but it also—and this is our chosen nexus—produces an undifferentiated gesture of meaning; under masterly hands punning is the onomatopoeia of meaning. Which is to say that the play upon words is both the most immediate and most final congeries of signs; it is the very gesture which identifies the elements of the sound with the elements of meaning.

Let us take three examples from Shakespeare, all short. The first centers in a single word spoken by Horatio to Hamlet. He says that the ghost had appeared two nights together "In the dead vast and middle of the night." *Vast* is of course the focal word, and it should be said at once that it appears in this form only in the first Quarto. In the second Quarto and the first Folio it was *wast,* and in the second, third and fourth folios it was *waste.* My contention is (which I borrow in part from Empson in his *Seven Types of Ambiguity*) that no matter which way the word is printed the effect of all three is evident and felt, with a strong possibility of a fourth sense, that of *waist,* as well. The accident of the recorded variations in printing forces the attention upon the variety of meanings bedded down to sleep in this single syllable. Let us read the line in the middle spelling: "In the dead wast and middle of the night," and do we not have all at once in the word the sense of the vast void of the night, the stretching and useless waste of the night, and the waist or middle and generative part of the night as well? And do we not have, finally, a kind of undifferentiated meaning which is a product of all three, a gesture of meaning which can only be less defined the more deeply it is experienced?

The second example is still shorter than the first and requires almost no exposition. There is a line in *Macbeth,* when murder is all acanter in the offing, which images "in his surcease, success." So far as the sound goes the words vary only enough to permit sharp play among them, but so far as the literal meaning goes there is almost direct contradiction, yet in the gesture or play which the two make together there is a new meaningfulness that could not be produced without the play. *Success* is so to speak the cadence that falls from *and* rounds out *surcease*; and with an evil omen in it unknown to the speaker.

The third example is from one of the sonnets most nearly packed with

similar play of meaning ("The expense of spirit in a waste of shame"), but from which I take only the most obvious play. Speaking of lust, the poet says it is:

> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
> Past reason hated.

Reading these lines, the play of meaning between *hunted* and *hated* so grows upon me that I cannot help thinking somewhere between the two, as a kind of backward consequence, of the poet as past reason *haunted* as well, for that is what the whole sonnet gives as gesture out of the focus of the phrases quoted. Surely one is haunted by what one both hunts and hates.

To bring the three examples together, can we not say that the gesture of these plays upon and within words constitutes the revelation of the *sum* or *product* of all the meanings possible within the focus of the words played upon, even though we did not know what all those meanings were? Language as gesture creates meaning as conscience creates judgment, by feeling the pang, the inner bite, of things forced together.

Here is a good place to introduce, for relief from too high a tone, a conspicuous example of the superficially frivolous intellectual onomatopoeia. It is the first two lines from Wallace Stevens' poem, "Bantams in Pine-Woods," and conceals nothing which it does not also disclose.

> Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan
> Of tan with henna hackles, halt!

I should say that this was a maximum case of alliteration and rhyme taken as pun, and pun both of sound and meaning, for the sound of the lines presses into meaning and the meaning is pressed into sound. There is a kind of close roistering in the syllables, with such yelping at the heels of meaning and such a hullabaloo of meaning in the sound, which prevents one from knowing what is going on except in such a double and darting image as drunkards delight to see. More seriously we can say that these lines are an example of words which, by being momentarily deprived of their normal meanings, tend to become gesture, just as words which temporarily go beyond their normal meanings, such as the word *geo-politics* today, also tend to become gesture. That Stevens should practice such examples, and that we should delight in them, is altogether natural. The whole movement in the arts known progressively as dadaism and surrealism was devoted, in its poetry, to releasing such gestures from language by the deliberate obliteration of the normal modes of meaning from the context. The difference between Stevens and the surrealists is that Stevens writes his words in such a way that they are able to resume their natural modes so soon as the gesture is released. So with Eliot in such lines as "I should have been a pair of ragged claws, scuttling across the floors of silent seas," and so Shakespeare's "miching mallecho," which the glossary says means mouching mischief, but which means miching mallecho just the same. The Queen was much better informed than the

glossary, when she said to Hamlet with regard to the invoked ghost:

> This is the very coinage of your brain:
> This bodiless creation ecstasy
> Is very cunning in.

The poet is likely to make his purest though not his profoundest gestures when most beside himself. If words fail they must serve just the same. Transformed into gesture, they carry the load, wield the load, lighten the load, and leap beyond the load of meaning.

But in this carrying, wielding, lightening, and leaping there are abler agents than that uncovered by the resort to nonsense; abler because, once mastered, they are always reliable. I mean such formal agents as plot and metre and refrain. Plot is too large an order to discuss here, but it may be said that it is the stress and urgency of plot that determine *what* gestures are wanted and by its exigencies *when* they shall be released. Plot does in a large way pretty much the same sort of thing that metre and refrain do in the small; and if we cannot see infinity in the palm of the hand and eternity in an hour, we shall not see them at all.

Coleridge defined metre as the motion of meaning, and accepting that we must also for our present purposes turn it around and say that motion is the metre of meaning. That is, if metre as motion brings meaning to gesture, then motion as metre moors gesture to meaning. There is a mutual tying down process, in the operation of metre, a strict and precise delivery of detail in an order of movement, which, well used, gives a sense of absolute speed and absolute position otherwise unavailable to the poet. Where would "Tiger tiger burning bright / In the forest of the night" be if its wild syllables and wilder insights were not measured out in an expected, a conventionally recognizable, order? But on the other hand where would the speed of the metre be if it were not both initially and finally established by the movement to and from gesture that the words make? These are questions that could have been asked of every quotation we have dealt with, including those in prose, for there is a pattern to the rhythm of prose which has much the same function as metre in verse.

Refrain, like metre, has to do with the ordering of perceptions, and in that sense we may say that refrain is a means of emphatic ordering; but it is more than that, it modifies meaning itself by giving to gesture a conventional form. Refrain, or nearly identical repetition, gives particular form, on a general and dependable model, to gesture that might otherwise be formless. Refrain is the emphatic measure of all those gestures that have to do with the declaration of recurrence, return, rebirth and new birth, of motion in stillness and stillness in motion, of permanence in change, and change in permanence. It is the lyric gesture of recognition and the emphatic gesture of identity. The ballads are full of it and the songbooks, whether Elizabethan or cowboy or the latest collection of popular catches. I choose as free examples, Greene's "Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee," which upon its last recurrence identifies

with the substance of the poem, and Spenser's "Sweet Thames! runne softly, till I end my Song," which makes a gesture of inclusiveness for all that mounts up to it, and Dunbar's "Timor mortis conturbat me," which in every repetition makes the gesture of focus. A more deliberate example where the refrain is used to modify the meaning backwards and forward, would be Yeats' double refrain in "Crazy Jane and the Bishop." I give together the two lines that come four lines apart: "All find safety in the tomb / The solid man and the coxcomb." Better still is the refrain in "Crazy Jane on God," for the effect of its developing action in recurrence can be briefly abstracted. The first stanza ends, "Men come, men go; *all things remain in God,*" the second emphasizes the same image, and the third contrasts it. The fourth stanza reads:

> I had wild Jack for a lover;
> Though like a road
> That men pass over
> My body makes no moan
> But sings on:
> *All things remain in God*

Thus we see by the use of refrain insight become deepening gesture.

But refrain is a mere instrument or aid to order, and will flatten a poem like a burden if it is not constantly refreshed from the common resources of language itself. Let us end, then, with brief examinations of three examples, of which the first two are determined partly by the critical words themselves and partly by the order in which they occur, and of which the third makes a pretty complete use of all the devices of lyric poetry, including all those here discussed. The first is from *Hamlet*, and is found in the dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio, just before they go in for the final duel. The passage is in prose.

> *Hor.* You will lose this wager, my lord.
> *Ham.* I do not think so; since he went into France, I have been in continual practice; I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter."

"But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart." Do not these words rise from what is past and fall toward what is coming, and both rise and fall as a gesture, almost his last, out of Hamlet himself? We see how order and cadence and the ear of the poet give the actor all that he has to do except that most arduous thing, put the gesture in the words into the gesture of his mere voice and body.

The second example is from *Othello*. Othello is at swords' points with himself over Desdemona's teasing request for him to make up his quarrel with Cassio, and has just dismissed her. Looking after her he exclaims:

> Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,
> But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
> Chaos is come again.

Here in the order both of the plot and of the lines, and in the fall of the plot and of the lines, too, the word *chaos* acts to pull into the context a whole realm of being not otherwise present. Shakespeare had undoubted-

ly re-made this line from its earlier version of *Venus and Adonis,* where "Black chaos comes again when beauty is dead," and he had probably in both instances the Graeco-latin sense of chaos in mind; the yawning gulf or gap, the abyss of night, the original dark, as well as the sense of disorder and formlessness; both senses were Elizabethan. We have thus the gesture of invoked prophecy made actual in the gesture of a word. The mere actor can do no more than leave it alone to act itself.

Our third example does not envisage an actor and could not use one, if even the best offered, for more than its merely immediate effects; its major effects transpire only in the inward ear. It is a poem which, using alliteration and rhyme and metre and refrain, using symbol and making symbol, playing upon its words as it runs, escapes all the mere meaning in words and reaches the pure meaningfulness of gesture. You can do with it whatever you will, for with poems of this order all things are possible. It is Yeats' "I am of Ireland."

'I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
'Come out of charity,
Come dance with me in Ireland.'

One man, one man alone
In that outlandish gear,
One solitary man
Of all that rambled there
Had turned his stately head.
'That is a long way off,
And time runs on,' he said,
'And the night grows rough.'

'I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
'Come out of charity
And dance with me in Ireland.'

'The fiddlers are all thumbs,
Or the fiddle-string accursed,
The drums and the kettledrums
And the trumpets all are burst,
And the trombone,' cried he,
'The trumpet and trombone,'
And cocked a malicious eye,
'But time runs on, runs on.'

'I am of Ireland,
And the Holy Land of Ireland,
And time runs on,' cried she.
'Come out of charity
And dance with me in Ireland.'

With this poem as evidence I think it may be said in conclusion that we feel almost everything that deeply stirs us as if it were a gesture, the gesture of our uncreated selves. Thus as artists we would create great gestures; and if we most often fail to do so, it it because, as Shakespeare says, "The deep of night is crept upon our talk," which is a gesture that must overwhelm us even though we realise as we consent to it, that we have made it ourselves.

FRANZ KAFKA:

A Little Woman

Translated by Francis C. Golffing.

Translator's Note

"Eine Kleine Frau," one of four stories comprising *"Der Hungerkünstler,"* was probably written during the author's brief stay in Berlin in 1923-24. As in most of his last pieces, Kafka here abandons straight narrative progression for a technique wholly peculiar to him: a gradual encircling of his subject by means of scrupulous casuistry, which continually shrinks from final judgment, or, indeed, final statement. As in his greater works he achieves in this miniature an oppressive and yet salutary sense of *Ausweglosigkeit,* of the insolubleness of human relations, and of radical, if desperate, self-examination. The "little woman"—his Berlin landlady, suspicious of the stranger (partly because he was a writer)—is symbolic, a tortuous projection of the writer's guilt-feeling over irresolution and personal inadequacy. The ultimate motives of the protagonist's failure to remedy a surprisingly simple and commonplace situation are metaphysical and not wholly reducible to social or psychological terms. When all the psychopathic elements have been deducted, there remains a residue of genuine spiritual disturbance, which is religious in origin and common to all men.

She is a little woman; though rather slim by nature, she is tightly laced. I see her always in the same dress made of a yellowish grey, wood-colored material and decked out with tassels or button-like appendages of the same color. She never wears a hat; her dull blonde hair is smooth, and though untidy, very loosely done. Despite her stays she is quite agile; yet she somewhat overdoes her nimbleness, setting her arms akimbo and turning her shoulders sideways with surprisingly quick jerks. The impression her hand makes upon me I can only render by saying that I have never seen a hand of which the separate fingers were so sharply defined as hers. And yet her hand shows no anatomical peculiarities whatever: it is a perfectly normal hand.

Now this little woman is very dissatisfied with me. Continually she finds something in me to object to; continually she is being injured by me; I annoy her at every step. If one were able to divide life into infinitesimal parts and to judge each particle separately, each of the particles of my life would surely offend her. I have often wondered why I annoy her so much. It may be that everything about me outrages her sense of beauty, her sense of justice, her habits, her traditions, and her aspirations. There are no doubt natures essentially antagonistic to one another; but why does that make her suffer so much? There is, after all, between us no relationship which would force her to suffer on my account. All she would have to do would be to regard me as a complete stranger, which indeed I am; and I should not only not protest such a decision, but in fact welcome it. She would only have to forget my existence, which I have never foisted upon her or wished to foist upon her,—and all her sorrows would be over. Here I quite leave out of account myself, and the fact that her attitude is

of course also troubling to me; I do this because I am forced to realize that my trouble is nothing compared with her grief. And yet I am fully aware that her grief is not prompted by love. She cannot be at all concerned with improving me, since none of the things she finds fault with are such as would impede my progress. She does not care about my progress; she cares only for her personal interest, which consists in a desire to avenge herself for the pain I cause her, and to prevent any pain I might cause her in the future. I once tried to point out to her how this perpetual annoyance could most easily be stopped. But by so doing I put her into such a commotion that I shall not repeat the attempt.

Besides, there is a certain responsibility incumbent on me, for even though the little woman is a stranger and the only relationship between us arises from the annoyance I cause her (or rather the annoyance she chooses to suffer through me), I am by no means indifferent to the way in which this pain affects her even physically. Now and then, especially of late, I have learned that once again she has started the day pale, weary, tormented by headache, and almost incapable of work. This causes anxiety to her kin, and people hazard various vain guesses concerning the cause of her predicament. I am the only one who knows it: it is the old, and yet ever new vexation. Now I am far from sharing the anxieties of her relatives. She is strong and tough. A person capable of so great an anger is likely to withstand the effects of that anger. I even have a suspicion that, partially at least, she only feigns suffering in order to direct the eyes of the world toward me. She is too proud to admit openly how much I torment her by my very existence; to appeal to others on my account she would consider beneath her dignity. She only occupies herself with me out of disgust, out of an incessant disgust which drives her on; to drag this unclean matter out into the open would be too much for her pride. Yet it would also be too much for her to remain silent about a thing under whose continual pressure she lives. Hence with her feminine cunning, she attempts a compromise: by keeping silence, and yet showing ing all the outward signs of a secret ill, she is resolved to bring the case before the public tribunal. She may even hope by directing the full stare of the public on me to stir up a general fury against me, which by virtue of its strength would undo me more quickly and forcibly than her relatively weak private anger could. Then she would withdraw, give a sigh of relief, and turn her back on me. Well, if these should really be her hopes she is mistaken. The public is not going to take over her role; the public will never find so much fault with me, even under their strongest microscope. I am not such a useless person as she thinks. I do not wish to boast, especially not in this connection. Yet although I am not marked by any special usefulness, I am not wholly lacking in virtue either. To her only, to her almost incandescent eyes, I appear so; but she will never convince anybody else of it. Then mightn't I be wholly reassured on that score? By no means. For should it leak out that I make her literally sick through my conduct (and certain busybodies are just about to discover it,

or at least act as if they were); should the world come and ask me why on earth I torture the poor little woman so much; should they ask if I am determined to drive her to distraction, and when I shall have the good sense and simple human decency to stop—should, I say, the world question me thus, it would be hard for me to answer. Should I admit that I do not believe in these symptoms, and by so doing create the unpleasant impression that in order to vindicate myself I accuse others, moreover in such an indelicate manner? Or should I say frankly that even if I believed in a real ailment I could not have any sympathy, since the woman is a complete stranger to me, and since our relationship was created by her and is being maintained only on her part? I do not mean to say that people would disbelieve me; rather, they would neither believe nor disbelieve. Things would never get that far. They would only take note of my attitude toward a frail, worn-out woman; and that would clearly be to my disadvantage. In this as in any other answer I would be stubbornly crossed by the inability of the world to dismiss in a case like that the suspicion of a love relationship. And yet it should be perfectly plain that such a relationship does not exist, and that if it existed it would be wholly on my part. For I should indeed be able to admire the little woman for the vigor of her judgments and the consistency of her conclusions, were I not continually punished by these very virtues. At all events, there is no trace in her of any friendly feeling toward me. In this she is sincere and straighforward; on this my last hope rests. Not even if it should suit her stategy to make others believe in such a relationship would she forget herself so far as to give that impression. But the public, always wholly obtuse in these matters, would persist in its opinion and decide against me.

It would seem, then, that there is only one course left open to me: to mend myself in time and before the world actually interferes; in the hope not of removing the little woman's anger, which is impossible, but of tempering it. And I have indeed often wondered whether my present plight is really so satisfactory as to preclude any desire for change; if it were not possible to effect certain inner adjustments, not because I am convinced of their necessity but only in order to appease the woman. I have made an honest attempt, taking considerable pains; and I will add that my efforts must have corresponded to some genuine need: they almost succeeded in cheering me. A few changes ensued and became quite manifest. There was no need to draw her attention to them, for she notices these things before I do; in fact, she is able to notice the expression of my intention in my whole being. However, I was not granted a success. After all, how could I expect it? I have now come to realize that her dissatisfaction with me is absolute; nothing can remove it, not even my physical extinction. If she were to receive news of my suicide her fury would be unbounded.

Now I cannot imagine that this sagacious woman should be less aware of all this than I am. She must realize not only the hopelessness of her endeavors but also my innocence, and my inability, try as I may, to

satisfy her demands. She no doubt realizes these things, but, being a born fighter, she forgets them in the heat of battle. Now I have an unfortunate way—which, however, is congenital with me—of whispering gentle warnings to people who are quite out of their senses. Things being thus, we shall of course never understand each other. Again and again I shall leave my house, filled with early morning bliss, only to see petulantly pouted lips and a face careworn because of me. I shall meet her scrutinizing gaze, which will have found me out even before she has started her scrutiny; her eyes will rove all over me, and nothing can escape them, however casual the look. I shall see the bitter smile boring itself into her girlish cheek and her plaintive looking up to the sky; the pressing of her hands against her waist as though she wished to steady herself and, in a final fit of indignation, her pallor and trembling.

Lately I hinted at this problem to a good friend of mine, for the very first time, as I realized with some surprise. Speaking of it in just a few casual words, I reduced the matter, trivial enough in its outward aspects, even below its actual importance. Strange to say, my friend did not brush it aside, but even added some further significance of his own. He would not be diverted from the subject. Yet what was even stranger, he nevertheless minimized it in a vital point, for he advised me in all seriousness to take a little trip. No counsel could have been more incomprehensible to me. True, things are simple enough; anybody who cares to inspect them closely could fathom them; however, they are not quite so simple that my going away would solve them wholly or even the major part of them. On the contrary, I have to be careful about absenting myself. If I am to follow any plan at all, then certainly it should be that of keeping the matter within its present narrow bounds, which do not implicate the outer world. Hence I ought to remain quietly where I am, admitting no conspicuous changes occasioned by it. Part of this policy would be not to discuss it with anybody: not because it is a dangerous secret, but rather because it is a trifling affair, wholly personal, and as such easily borne, and should be kept within this compass. Here the remarks of my friend were not wholly useless. They haven't taught me anything new, but they have confirmed me in my basic opinion.

Indeed, the more I think about it, the more clearly I realize that the changes which this matter has undergone in the course of time are not intrinsic at all, but merely the development of my view of it, inasmuch as my view has grown calmer, more manly, and has come closer to the core of the matter. At the same time, under the inevitable influence of constant fine perturbations, it has assumed a certain irritability.

I actually take things more calmly now, for I realize that a decision, though it may seem imminent at times, is not likely. One is inclined, especially in young years, to overestimate greatly the pace at which decisions arrive. Once when my little judge, grown faint at the sight of me, sank sideways into a chair, holding on with one hand to the back of the chair and with the other fumbling at her bodice, while tears of rage and despair rolled down her cheek, I thought: Now the decision has come.

and presently I shall be summoned to answer for myself. But no, there was no question of either decision or vindication. Women easily become faint; the world hasn't time to attend to all such occasions. And after all, what has really happened in all these years? Simply that such incidents have recurred, now more forcibly, now less, and that consequently their sum-total has increased; that people hang around her and would like to interfere if they could find an opportunity, which they haven't done as yet. They are still relying on their flair, and flair is good for nothing except to keep its owner busy. But it has always been thus: there have always been these idle standers-on-corners and sniffers-of-air who have justified their presence in some over-clever fashion, preferably on the pretext of kinship. They have always watched, always with their noses full of flair, but the only result has been that they are still standing there. There is only one difference: I have gradually suceeded in telling them apart. Formerly I had thought that they were moving in from everywhere, and that the affair was increasing and by its very size would force a decision. Today I think I know that all this has existed eternally, and that it has little or nothing to do with the approach of a decision. And as for the decision itself,—why do I give it such a big name? True, if it should come to pass (and it will certainly not be tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, and probably never) that the public should take up the matter (for which, as I shall go on repeating, it is not competent), I cannot hope to emerge unscathed. Still, it will probably be taken into account that I am not unknown to the public, that I have always lived in their full view, trusting and deserving of trust, and that the very worst this supervenient little woman could do would be to add an ugly little flourish to the diploma in which the world has long since written me down a respectable member. I may remark at random that anyone but me would perhaps long ago have recognized her as a burr and crushed her under his foot, unnoticed by the world.

That I have yet grown a little uneasy as the years went on, has nothing to do with the real significance of the case. One simply cannot endure to cause continual annoyance. One grows uneasy, one gets into a state of almost physical expectancy, even if one does not rationally count on a decision.

This is partly a mere sign of growing old. Everything is becoming to youth; unlovely details are lost in its perpetual flow of energy. If a boy has a somewhat prying look nobody takes exception to it, nobody notices it, not even himself. But if a trait persists into maturity it has become ingrained; nothing is any longer susceptible of change; everything is under surveillance. The prying look of an aging man is plainly a prying look, nor is it hard to discover it. Only, here again, it is not a question of real deterioration.

From whatever point I look at it, I am more and more convinced that if I cover the matter ever so lightly with my hand I may yet be able to continue my present life quietly and without interference from the world, let the little woman rage as she will.

E. E. CUMMINGS:

Three Poems

1.

Hello is what a mirror says
it is a maid says Who
and(hearing not a which)replies
in haste I must be you

no sunbeam ever lies

Bang is the meaning of a gun
it is a man means No
and(seeing something yes)will grin
with pain You so&so

true wars are never won

2.

life is more true than reason will deceive
(more secret or than madness did reveal)
deeper is life than lose:higher than have
—but beauty is more each than living's all

multiplied with infinity sans if,
the mightiest meditations of mankind
cancelled are by one merely opening leaf
(beyond whose nearness exists no beyond)

or does some littler bird than eyes can learn
look up to silence and completely sing?
futures are obsolete;pasts are unborn
(here less than nothing's more than everything)

death,as men call him,ends what they call men
—but beauty is more now than dying's when

3.

o by the by
has anybody seen
little you-i
who stood on a green
hill and threw
his wish at blue

with a swoop and a dart
out flew his wish
(it dived like a fish
but it climbed like a dream)
throbbing like a heart
singing like a flame

blue took it my
far beyond far
and high beyond high
bluer took it your
but bluest took it our
away beyond where

what a wonderful thing
is the end of a string
(murmurs little you-i
as the hill becomes nil)
and will somebody tell
me why people let go

JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN:

Observatory Hill

Thinking of action in the blue poise of evening,
Watching the white observatory dome that turns
And stops, and hugely opening
Submits a complex eye
To the indifference of eternity
Like some astonished chick
Cracking a shell to try its excellence;
Involved with natural law,
I felt that utter breakage in my hands.
Pursuing images, I saw
My settled shore and frontier struck from view
And, as the chick on fragments settles back,
The telescope retires to its womb,
I bunched my coat and, chilly, cut for home.

Boxed at the nervy center of a room,
I watched a spectacle of stars

Like inward microbes fastened to my heart,
And knew the windows false,
And met that evil order looking straight.
Let Whitman go, and all the rest
Who turned their broad glad faces on the West;
Since all deliberate innocence must fail,
Call back the heart, the naive heart, and tell—
Why, any random agony will do—
How those of single vision are brought down:
The mad, in furs, dead at the coldest poles,
The aviators choked in high inhuman air,
All hunters of a vision of white whales
Who, planting their acquisitive eyes
On one horizon opposite death
Must, somewhere in that self-destroying chase,
Burn to the purposive bones of faith;
Giving madness its fragment of valor
Until, wrapped in a bravery of mistakes,
They find their graves in learned paradox.

From those circumferences returned,
I fixed the impartial lens and telescopic eye
Dead center down and learned
Beethoven's triumph in his muffled room,
Saw Vincent's bleeding ear in a golden frame,
Walked blind with Joyce, while through the sensual gloom,
Alternatively riding and at bay,
The music of heroic heresy
Sang like an underwater bell
Through every hammered syllable.
I knew forever then the last frontier
Not to be reached by coasting over land
Toward an Atlantic or Pacific strand
But, like the perishable isle of coral drowned,
In constricted channel found
Lonely and not for long; for the single traveler
Who greets it with penultimate despair
Frontier becomes exit and entrance there.
O generating core,
Within whose strict and diamond eye
My sight is fractured and set free,
In whose expansive process shine
Man's riven heart, the stones of Stalingrad
And Wednesday's dead;
Surrendered down, contracted to your tragedy,
The cancerous root, the souring earth, I sing
And move among your ruins conquering.

DAVID DAICHES:

Problems for Modern Novelists

Part II: PLOT, STYLE, & THE QUESTION OF VALUE

Fiction as an art form is the narration of a series of situations which are so related to each other that a significant unity of meaning is achieved; the narration, moreover, is couched in such a "style" that at each point in its progress the kind of relation between retrospect and anticipation is set up which continually and cumulatively reinforces the desired implications of the plot, so that the plot becomes symbolic as well as literal in its meaning. The novelist thus has a problem both of structure and of style: he must know both how to put a story together and how to express each of its parts. Both these aspects of the novelist's job are important in any discussion of the means that he employs in his endeavor to give the proper symbolic expansion to his characters and incidents. Such expansion is achieved not only by the way in which each incident is related to the sum total of incidents; the kind of language through which the incidents are communicated helps continually and progressively to expand the implications of the novel as it develops, until the full richness of meaning has been attained.

Obviously the novelist must be clear concerning the *kind* of symbol that he wants to make out of his characters and incidents, and the *method* that he will employ in producing it. The symbol need not be of one kind only—i.e. the novelist need not restrict the symbolic implications of characters and incidents to historical or social or psychological references only. The good historical novel, for example—and this is one thing that distinguishes a good historical novel from a good history—will have at least both historical and psychological symbolization: the situation will illuminate an historical state of affairs and the nature of man in general. In the great majority of the American novels dealing with the Civil War, the historical symbolization is more adequate than the psychological, and in a novel that is a defect: the reader gets a sense of history but no adequate or convincing sense of character. In a novel like *The Cloister and the Hearth* historical and psychological symbols are more effectively balanced. The method of achieving and of communicating these kinds of symbolization will vary with the novelist's relations to his audience—a factor which many novelists take into consideration without being fully conscious that they are doing so.

Both structure and style are important as methods of symbolization, and of the two structure is perhaps the more fundamental. This seems to

be what Aristotle was getting at when he said that "plot is the first principle and as it were the soul of tragedy." It is the order of events that gives them their proper meaning. But for this to be true some agreement must exist between author and reader concerning the significance of those events in themselves. For the hero and heroine to marry after a series of vicissitudes is only a successful resolution of the plot if author and reader agree in taking marriage as a symbol of a happy ending. If the reader held the view that marriage, far from symbolizing a happy ending, is an uncertain beginning, no conclusion at all but the commencement of a hazardous experiment, the novel, however well constructed, would not be able to communicate to that reader its full meaning. For in matters of this kind Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" will not work: we may all, in reading any novel, be able to bring ourselves to refrain from disbelief in the actuality of the events narrated, but belief in the actuality of events is not the same thing as agreement concerning their significance.

There is a relation between the kind of assumptions which the author expects to share with his readers and the kind of technique he employs in putting his full meaning across. The fictional techniques of Tchekhov and Dickens are very different, and so are their assumptions. Dickens's assumptions are more definite, and more ethical in their immediate implications, than those of Tchekhov: his structure is therefore more mechanical, his style more rhetorical, his envelope more solid. The private visions of Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield—personal intuitions concerning the significance of what on any public standard are insignificant events—depend for their effective communication on a minimum of general assumptions, and demand therefore a technique whose lyrical sensitivity is able to make contact with those few and half-hidden intuitions which the reader shares without knowing that he does, or, alternatively, is able to persuade the reader as he reads of the validity of those personal intuitions of the author. Thus these more personal writers are both more rhetorical and less rhetorical than novelists like Dickens. They are less rhetorical in the obvious sense that they are not using certain common convictions concerning the significance or quality of events and characters and ideas in order to achieve full communication with their readers: they are more rhetorical in that, patterning their work largely in accordance with private intuitions, they must make the reader accept the validity of those intuitions while he reads. In a sense, all art is persuasion, and the more lyrical it is the more persuasive it must be. It is a great paradox, but an illuminating one, that, in a sense, music is the most rhetorical of the arts, for no differences in intellectual belief alter its effect. Music can persuade people who agree on nothing to join in a common emotion. Hitler's taste in literature is very different from that of the intellectuals he hounded from their country, but many of those he exiled and persecuted share his enthusiasm for Wagner.

At any rate, whether we accept this extension of the argument or not, it is clear that the proper organization of plot in fiction cannot be divorced

from the question raised earlier, the question of the rhetorical aspect of fiction, of whether to choose the Hemingway or the Virginia Woolf tradition. In constructing his plot, therefore, the novelist must consider his "audience," real or ideal, and the beliefs of that audience, and the way in which he is going to utilize those beliefs; or, if he decides not to utilize those beliefs at all, he must work out some compensating techniques, some devices that will enable the reader to make the proper symbolic expansions as he reads without any initial agreement between writer and reader on questions of significance and value. This last task is much harder for the novelist than for the lyrical poet. In proportion as the arts become less "concrete" in content (moving from simple narrative through epic to lyric poetry and finally to music, "pure form") it becomes easier to ignore the assumptions and beliefs of your audience. Fiction depends more than any of the other arts on these assumptions. To assume (as Pater did) that art is "purer" in proportion as it moves away from dependence on these assumptions and "tends toward the condition of music," is to adopt a very arbitrary definition of art. The rhetorical aspect of fiction, which is treated by far too many critics as though it is something to be ashamed of and argued away, gives to the novel a kind of richness and profundity unique among the arts. The richness and profundity of, say, a late Beethoven quartet is as great of its kind as that of *The Brothers Karamazov,* but comparison between the two through any means except the demonstration of the utter difference between the medium employed by the one and that employed by the other can only confuse aesthetic discussion. Appreciation of the *oikeia hedone,* the "peculiar pleasure"—and the peculiar medium —of each art is the first requirement of an adequate aesthetic, and the eighteenth-century discussions of "parallels" between painting, music and poetry have left a permanent legacy of harm to art criticism in the same way that late nineteenth-century discussions of the relation of literature to music have confused literary theory.

As soon as a novelist decides to employ a subject matter which is obviously significant and interesting for his generation as a whole—if, say, he should write about the present world war—he is more or less committed to the more solid envelope, to the more rhetorical devices. The temptation, in fact, for a novelist who chooses such a subject is to overemphasize the rhetorical element in these devices, to make the symbolization too specific, so that the work becomes, not fiction employing legitimate rhetorical devices, but simply rhetoric. This is a fault that can be charged to Eric Knight's *This Above All,* which is more a persuasive discussion of contemporary Britain than a work of literary art. The problem is to give the proper significance to the events by arranging them in the proper order and patterning them in the proper way. And the "proper" significance is their significance as symbols in a novel rather than in a tract or a sermon. A symbol appropriate to fiction is more profound in its implications, is capable of much greater expansion, than a symbol appropriate to simple rhetoric or simple exposition.

But the order of events is obviously only one of the devices which the novelist uses in order to achieve proper symbolization for character and incident. The other is style, the kind of language employed in expressing the individual incident. Style provides a means of symbolizing as you move, it makes possible at each point communication with maximum implication. It is in virtue of style that a description of a walk along a city street can become more than a record of things seen and heard but an interpretation of human experience, a comment on humanity. Style is that unique use of the medium of expression which gives to the thing expressed a meaning which cannot be given in any other way. Like structure, it is a means of providing symbolic expansion of incidents: through style man's behavior becomes man's fate.

Both the proper choice of words, then, and the order and pattern of the incidents, contribute to making minimum into maximum communication, to making a neutral situation into a significant and symbolic one. (Art, indeed, can be defined as unneutral communication, where the belligerency of the artist is unnoticed until it has had its effect: but the artist is fighting to achieve meaning, not to induce action.) What is the relation of these two devices to each other, the relation of style to plot? The fact is that style is really a function of plot: it is the proper handling of the plot at any given moment. Considerations of plot refer to the arrangement of larger units of the story; considerations of style refer to smaller units. But the distinction is theoretical only; actually, they are part of the same thing, they flow into each other.

Literature, like music and unlike painting, communicates its effect in a chronological sequence, in time. And style, depending, like plot, on time, becomes a function of a plot in that by order, emphasis and vocabulary we bring out the implications of (i.e. define *and* enrich) the parts as they are being shaped, by sequence and structure, into a unity. The proper unity and the proper meaning, the proper symbolic expansion, is thus attained in virtue of the style of the writing.

One of the differences between literature and journalism is that, in the former, style is a function of the plot and in the latter it is not. By style we are able to make the time dimension our slave instead of our master, expanding each unit to its proper symbolic significance, building up, by proper retrospect and anticipation, the attitude and the atmosphere in the light of which the work has unity, and the proper unity. Through style an account of a man walking along a busy street on a summer afternoon can be presented as a profound and symbolic interpretation of experience—not through conscious ratiocination or elaboration, not through sentimentality or vagueness, not through digressions or whimsies, but through discipline merely, through proper organization, through style.

To put the matter in yet another way, we might say that style is what adds insight to recognition. This statement presupposes that literature, or at least fiction, ought to communicate to the reader both insight and recognition. That this is so will appear from reflection on the differences

between literature and journalism or between purely representative photography and a portrait which is at the same time a work of art. Any work of literary art communicates a note of conviction, of authenticity, so that the reader responds not with the simple reaction of "how true" but with more complex gestures of recognition—not of literal recognition, for few of us have had our fathers murdered by our uncles like Hamlet or have spent our childhood at Combray like Proust, but none the less recognition of the situation presented as fundamentally authentic, as really belonging to human experience. But the function of art is not simple recognition: many a second rate photographer or an indifferent sketcher can produce a reasonable likeness which we will recognize as a picture of a friend or even of a type, and any competent journalist can give a description of a street which we recognize as a street we know or might have known. No, imitation, *mimesis,* is not the function of art: imitation is too easy. If imitation were the sole function of art then the best art would be the real thing —the thing imitated, and art would simply be an approximation to life. But the relation of literature to life is not that of approximation, it is that of illumination. Literature must communicate recognition *and* insight. The reader's reaction is a combination of the "how true" and the "how new." Recognition is communicated through the fundamental agreement between reader and writer about the broad nature of the subject matter, while insight is provided through the illumination given by the proper symbolic expansion, in achieving which both style and plot play their parts.

Writing which produces recognition without insight is journalism, and what produces insight without recognition is philosophy. The majority of routine novels must be classed as journalism rather than as literature, for they communicate recognition without insight (there is no symbolic expansion). The radio serial is another example of this kind of writing: most of the incidents in these stories are extremely true to life, but that is all they are. An interest in the routine daily living of a family just like one's own does not of itself argue any interest in or appreciation of literature. Another kind of inadequate literature is that which depends on the stock response, where the style is a list of clichés and has no organic relation to the plot: here we have second-hand insights presented without that uniqueness of expression necessary for their adequate communication. Much magazine fiction is of this order, and nearly all bad poetry can be explained in a similar way. A third, and not so common type of literary failure derives from improbabilities in the plot—not things which are physically improbable in real life, for these, as Aristotle pointed out, are not necessarily improbabilities for the artist, but contradictions within the work itself which remove all authenticity from the picture of life presented: here we have no recognition and so can have no insight. Occasionally a work of literature strikes us as possessing simply a false pattern—we recognize it as a lie, and no subtlety of style or organization can atone for that. This was at least one reader's reaction to Charles Morgan's *Sparkenbroke.* Fiction which is philosophy rather than art,

which communicates insight through discussion or dialogue but not through the way in which we are brought to recognize reality in the work is occasionally found in modern literature; perhaps Santayana's *The Last Puritan,* or Mann's *The Beloved Returns* falls into this category. *Marius the Epicurean* represents an attempt to maintain a precarious balance between the artist's and philosopher's methods of communicating insight, and Pater's novel stands at the head of the modern tradition.

The function of fiction—and perhaps of literature in general—is by producing in the reader a combination of recognition and insight to increase human self-consciousness in a manner which provides both knowledge and pleasure. It is, in fact, a unique way of communicating a unique kind of knowledge. But it would be both puritanical and unrealistic to refuse to admit that while this may be the main function of literature, or the main function of the greatest literature, there are other legitimate if minor kinds of literature which have no other function. A writer of fiction might, for example, choose to produce pure fantasy, having for its function the continual breaking down of the reader's expectations, which results in the reader's refreshment and his discovery of new angles of approach to things. Fantasy in literature has its own laws; it is not simply irresponsible writing. And it has its own special function. It may not be the most profound kind of writing, but it has its place. Fantasy, paradoxically enough, is most likely to make its appearance either in an age where community belief is particularly stable, so that the distinction between fantasy and reality is readily appreciated by the reader, or in a transition period when community belief is so uncertain that the author falls back on fantasy as a kind of relief from the uncertain and difficult business of distinguishing between the real and the fantastic. The latter kind of fantasy is less simple than the former; it represents the abrogation of any responsibility to reality on the author's part rather than a deliberate intention to be unreal, and may appear more or less fantastic to different readers. The former kind of fantasy is a relief from reality: the latter is a relief from deciding what is reality.

If fantasy has its own function, differing from what I have discussed as the main function of literature, so has allegory. In allegory we do not get the kind of expansive symbolization that is appropriate to fiction in general; we get, on the other hand, a specific and limited symbolization with a didactic or illustrative function. Occasionally we get works in which the symbolization is both specific and universal, depending on the way in which it is read, and this is perhaps true of any allegory which survives the audience for which it was written and remains as great literature. Literature can also serve a purely rhetorical function, and a novel can be written, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* simply in order to persuade the reader to take up a given course of action; such works ought to be read and assessed as rhetoric, as examples of what the older critics used to call "deliberative oratory." The incidents and characters in such works

are not symbols but examples: the difference between the two is very significant. A novel with a rhetorical purpose can nevertheless survive as a great novel if the examples are so treated that, while they are read by the immediate audience as examples, they survive for later audiences not as examples but as symbols.

And we must not forget that a legitimate, if minor, function of literature is simply recreation, play. English literature is particularly rich in this kind of writing: Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear represent a movement that has never been totally dead in England and which seems to emerge whenever the pomposity of the critics has proceeded beyond endurance.

Finally, writing may be just good journalism—vivid description and narration merely. Good journalism is not literature in the fullest sense, for literature is something more than lucid verbal communication; it is, as we have seen, also (in virtue of its style and organization) continuous symbolization. But the line between good journalism and genuine literature is not always easy to draw.

The distinction between the two, however, can best be seen if we consider the distinction between art and craft. We have already defined journalism as writing which produces recognition without insight and distinguished it from literature, which produces both, simultaneously and cumulatively. Because the artist's insight is unique, it must be communicated uniquely. What we call literary craftsmanship is the means necessary for conveying a unique insight uniquely. For a writer to be an artist he must possess both insight and the skill to convey it. He must have a special kind of vision and a special kind of skill. But the vision, the insight, must be there first. Skill without vision, craftsmanship without insight, is like a telephone with no one to talk into it: it is a useful instrument but it is not serving any purpose. One is reminded of Ruskin's remark on hearing that the first transatlantic cable had been laid and that now one could speak in London and be heard simultaneously in New York. But has the speaker anything to say that is worth saying? What is the use of being able to speak in London and be heard in New York if you have nothing to speak about?

Though we can have craftsmanship without art—skill without insight—it is impossible to have art without craftsmanship. And it is impossible to tell whether the kind of insight demanded of the artist exists or not unless it is communicated through adequate craftsmanship. The matter is complicated by the fact that often the skill appears to be creating the insight, and the experienced artist may often find (at a late stage) that his creative process works best that way. The musical *étude,* which is generally composed simply as a test of craftsmanship in the composer and executive ability in the performer, often automatically becomes art. Who can tell at what point a technical exercise in the writing of a fugue may cease to be an exercise and become a work of art? Any one who has learned to play a musical instrument will know how a "study" tends to

become a "piece."

This particular problem is more acute in music because, unlike painting and literature, music does not have any representational element: the distinction between form and content ceases to exist. Yet the problem is present in some degree in the other arts as well, and is clearly illustrated today in the great number of writers who possess a high degree of skill but seem to have no insights to justify their employing their skill. The typical *New Yorker* short story provides a good example of the writer who possesses craftsmanship without insight. These stories are not works of art; they are studies, exercises, études, übungen—yet occasionally they manage to approach art through sheer competence of technique, as though insight were created by skill. What actually takes place is more a problem for the psychologist than the critic; the psychology of literary creation is a vast and complicated subject in itself, and is not really relevant to the present discussion. For the important thing to the critic is what the work is, not how the author managed to produce it.

If craftsmanship without insight produces a kind of superior journalism—something between ordinary journalism and genuine art—it might perhaps be said that a Silver Age in literature is simply an age of excellent craftsmen who are not artists, an age of skill without insight. The twenty years between the two world wars seems to have been such a period both in Europe and America. As for the problem of insight without craft—we can never know about that, for if the skill is not there to communicate the insight we can never be aware of it. It might even be maintained that the kind of insight we associate with the artist cannot exist except in conjunction with the appropriate craftsmanship, so closely are the two bound up. That this kind of insight actually derives from sensitivity to the art medium is perhaps too rash a generalization, though it does appear to do so in the case of particular writers. There appear, in fact, to be two main classes of artists, those who begin with a sensitivity to the medium and are stimulated into their vision by an excitement over the potentialities of the medium, and those who begin with their insight and then proceed to find the appropriate means of adequate communication. At least in poetry this seems to be the case (witness the difference between Keats, say, and Milton) though in actual fact neither group may work in such a simple manner. But we are deviating again into the psychology of artistic creation.

What then, are the problems for modern novelists? The novelist ought to possess, first, an understanding of the nature of his symbolization and, second, an understanding of the method he employs to achieve that symbolization. Third, he must be aware of the way in which his methods depend on his relation to his audience. A fourth problem concerns the significance of the relation between plot and style, and a fifth is the more complicated one raised by the question of rhetoric, belief and symbolization that we have already discussed. Two further problems face the modern novelist. He must be aware of the kinds of faults that most

threaten the contemporary writer, and he must have some real understanding of the nature and value of his art. The latter point is particularly important in a time when a total war is being waged for civilization, for at such a time we must prepare to justify everything we hold valuable.

JEAN GARRIGUE:

Theme and Variation

Dear love, if we're a continent, then we,
All strong, deserve its honors too:
Its health and insolence and quaint
Up-building walks, its trees torn down
And wild leaf smell rank as brook beds
And the elve home of owls:
Dear love, if we who meet are continents
Then we have music: bitter exodus of flutes
And sovereign basses and the cello's comment,
Then have we music dancing on the needle time,
Whose metrics make an heaven in the mind;
Then have we seasons, trumpeted and strong,
Tongue blessing and the coddler of the eye,
Spool of milkweed, eggs of youngest robins,
The pitted strawberry and the furry snow:
Then have we skies of all countries and folk
Then be us countries, weather, bells and rock
Then be us bird bone (hollow like a flute)
O oxygen of rose and synthesis
Of root, hate, love and jealousy,
And lechery that fills each sense with revelation.
Then be us each to each
O bubble of the breath of sleep,
O god-borne wing caused by our smiles' meet,
Field, rock and unfelled forest where
Laughing we chide and sleeping bite
And eating dance all hallows of the night
And curry Love who clothes us there
In moon spray and berry, ties us to tides
And laps us, dew and day, to fairs of such a continent
We are in one another's sight.

F. C. WEISKOPF:

Poetry of the European Underground

We hear much about underground newspapers and leaflets but almost nothing about the part of literature and art in the desperate struggle fought in all Nazi-occupied countries against the invaders. Is it because there is practically no contribution of the arts to the "third front"? Or do the reports dealing with the activities of the European underground skip these contributions for their relative unimportance in comparison to sabotage in factories and guerilla raids on Nazi supply trains? Let us try to lift a corner of the veil of darkness hiding the "part of literature" in the movement of resistance in Hitler's Festung Europa.

First we have to recognize the limits of any kind of underground literary activity. With publishing houses and printing facilities under Nazi control, and with the underground organizations having at their disposal only a few very small presses and mimeographs, it goes without saying that there can be no underground fiction, not even in the form of short stories. The only branch of literature allowed to manifest itself in the underground struggle is poetry. (This does not preclude the existence of stories and novels in manuscript form, written under the very nose of the Gestapo; but manuscripts are only potential literature.)

In two countries within Hitler's New Order, poetry could for a certain time lead a half-legal existence—in Czechoslovakia, which was occupied prior to the outbreak of the war and where the Nazis tried first to "win over the populace in a mild way," and in the so-called non-occupied zone of France until November, 1942. In both countries the poets had to use certain methods of camouflage, but still they could manage to say what they wished to say. It is highly significant that in both countries poetry made a very definite turn toward the common man. In an essay about the character of the "Poetry in Europe Today," the editors of *Review 1943* (an Anglo-Czech magazine published in London) state that "this poetry springs from the community of fate between poets and people—a fate which has powerfully shaken the very essence of their physical and emotional life: it springs from a strong sense of danger and destruction and from a corresponding need for a unity of aim by which to destroy this danger and save the nation, its language, society, man and poetry; it springs from the experience of terrible events and from the feeling that a new world is being born; the poet could not remain indifferent to this experience and to this feeling."

We know from many reports that poems of Emmanuel, Aragon, and Gide, printed partly in Vichy and partly in Switzerland and circulated in both zones of France, were read by tens of thousands who before never reached for a volume of poetry. Poems by Aragon were reprinted in

underground papers and recited in broadcasts of the secret radio stations. Love of country, love of liberty, and, above all, faith in the final defeat of the foreign lords permeate all this work. We pick at random one of the hymns of Pierre Emmanuel to quote a few lines:

. . . Par dessus l'ordre dérisoire des tyrans
il y a la respirations des monts très bleus
il y a l'ordre des nuées et des cieux vastes
il y a les libres lointains de la prière
il y a les larges fronts qui ne se courbent pas
il y a les astres dans la liberté de leur essence
il y a les moissons du devenir
il y a dans les tryans une angoisse fatale
qui est la liberté effroyable de Dieu . . .

The Czech poets lived under more difficult conditions. Still they defied the Nazi efforts to coordinate the cultural life in such an efficient way that quisling minister Emanuel Moravec singled them out for a special attack, locking up in concentration camps the flower of the younger poetical generation—Vít Nezvel, Jaroslav Seifert, and Frantisek Halas—and closing down a number of publications. Nezval's long poem, "Historical Picture," seemingly dealing with ancient Bethlehem but in reality telling the story of the Nazi suppression of Czech freedom, was copied by hand in tens of thousands of sheets after the printed edition had been seized by the authorities. In other poems, the ire of Moravec and his Nazi superiors was aroused by the detection of subversive explosive charges hidden in lines like these which had passed the otherwise watertight censorship:

The palm of a hand
Is all we have.
The palm of native soil
And a seed which cries:
Defend from the the storm the soil of our land.

Poems by one of the most famous Czech poets, Jirí Wolker (who died in the twenties), are reprinted in many underground leaflets. Reports from Slovakia tell us that Nazis arrested a number of people for having copied the text of a poem about the Slovak quislings read over the short wave stations in London and Boston. The poem is by Voskovec and Werich, writers and actors, widely known in Czechoslovakia, now in this country.

In Poland, underground papers carried numerous poetical contributions. In the winter of 1943, even a slim volume of underground verse, mimeographed in occupied Poland, reached London. The authors, of course, are hiding in anonymity. The poems, unique as literary documents, are of varying literary value, but they are all simple, very human, sometimes painfully moving. There is for instance a song of a prisoner to his fellow prisoner. It ends with the words:

Metal clangs on our songs,
They come to us on the wind,
They beat at the doors of the prison,
They hammer with fists of songs,
And soon our fury will smash doors of iron.

Writing about underground poetry from Poland, Zofia Kwiatkowska mentions a very popular "Call to the Youth" in verse, beginning with the challenge, "There is no defeat," and a long poem, "Orders to Warsaw," the words of which were chalked on the walls of Polish cities in defiance of the Gestapo.

In Yugoslavia, where the relations between poetry and life were always very close, the guerilla troops have in their ranks numerous *guslars,* popular bards, singing the old epics of freedom as well as new songs. When the Serbs stood up, in 1804, in their first nation-wide rebellion against the foreign Turkish rule, a guslar named Philip Vishnich came from Bosnia to Serbia and played in the camps of the guerilla fighters. Today, great-grandchildren of Vishnich are active with the Yugoslav partisan armies. An Italian correspondent writing for the *Giornale d'Italia* in 1942, describes in some length the important part of the popular minstrels in the insurrection against the Axis, and the secret radio station "Slobodna Jugoslavija" regularly sends out poems and songs alongside news and manifestoes.

Little is known about the underground poetry in Germany proper. Yet there is some evidence of such a literature even in the army. German anti-Nazi magazines in Mexico and in this country published a collection of poems found by the Russians on the bodies of dead soldiers of the Wehrmacht. The principal themes of these poems—many of them very primitive doggerel, but a few of unquestionable literary character and value—are homesickness, loneliness, hunger, fear of death and winter. One of the poems, found in many copies on the dead German soldiers, ends as follows:

Und als es Winter wurde
In diesem öden Land,
Man drunten tief im Tale
Nur sein Gerippe fand.

Es schaut ein kleiner Zettel
Noch aus dem Schnee heraus.
Sein letzter Wunsch im Sterben:
Lasst mich nach Haus, nach Haus.

This and other similar *Soldatenlieder* are now used in the London and Moscow radio broadcasts in German, apparently with effective results. German soldiers in Tunisia and at the eastern front told their captors that they had been deeply impressed by this kind of radio propaganda.

AMONG RECENT BOOKS;

DUDLEY FITTS:

DELMORE SCHWARTZ: *Genesis.* New Directions.

The integrity of Delmore Schwartz, the intense seriousness which has marked his work from the outset, is the chief positive quality of this long biographical poem. It is also its chief preservative. If (one feels) he believed less strongly in the importance of the least of his particulars, if there were the least swerving in the direction of humor or fancy, *Genesis* would fall apart, consumed by its own *longueurs* and flatnesses. As it is, it is sustained by the author's faith and manages to achieve a kind of impressiveness in spite of itself. Its power is its sincerity. Its weaknesses are those of attitude (an invincible self pity), of tone (a mixture of coyness and exaggerated erudition), and of technic.

The narrator is one Hershey Green, a young New Yorker of European Jewish ancestry, lying abed in a state of waking dream. To him come Voices, demanding that he repeat to them, as he has often done to himself, the story of his life. These Voices are the Dead, and their comments upon Hershey's narrative make up the verse portions of the book—Hershey himself speaks in a kind of King-James-Version-*cum*-Sandburg prose. The recital begins with the protagonist's paternal grandfather, ne'er-do-well deserter from the Tsar's army at the time of the Russo-Turkish War, and ends with Hershey's awareness of the adultery of his equally ne'er-do-well father, shortly after the close of the First World War. The poem, of which *Genesis* is only the first section, is a study of Hershey's ancestry, his infancy, and early childhood. The rest will presumably follow in due course.

Delmore Schwartz is not to be excelled as a master of a certain kind of nostalgic evocation. I am thinking of the exquisitely handled title-piece of his first volume, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*—a prose poem which remains, for me, the best thing he has done. Since then, notably in *Shenandoah* and *Genesis,* he has tried to recapture and expand that success; but *Shenandoah* failed because the tenderness and sure taste of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* had become infected by something distinctly unpleasant—a horribly heavy playfulness and a hysterical super-Pagliaccian exhibitionism. The playfulness culminated in the 1941 "entertainment," *Paris and Helen,* a deplorable performance; the exhibitionism (this time it is "Cry, clown, cry!") is full blown in *Genesis.*

First, Hershey Green protests too much that he is Interesting, Significant. "Was this not thrilling?" he cries to the Voices at the end of his prose episodes. "Does this not inspire many a question?" "It does, it does, young man," replies one Ghost with an enthusiasm which I find hard to justify in the context. Or again: "Is this not interesting, my friends: are you not curious about the future of this story?" But it happens, especially in the early sections of the book, that the episodes are neither thrilling nor interesting. Partly this is because the poet has attempted to do so much in so little space. Partly it is because he is not writing about Hershey here—and Hershey alone has objective reality for him—but about Hershey's grandparents. The army-deserter grandfather, to take one example, has no validity as a character: tremendous things happen to him in the most casual way, he makes huge decisions with the air of a man choosing a cigar, but it is all so slapdash, so superficial, that it carries no conviction at all. It is only when we get to Hershey himself, and to his parents *as they impinge upon him,* that we feel that the ghosts really have something to sink their spectral teeth into.

Secondly, even when the substance is important and effectively presented, there is a too frequent tendency to let the ghostly Chorus swamp it with comment. Space will scarcely permit extended quotations; but I should like to cite, as an example of what I am talking about and of Schwartz's method in general, the end of a single episode and the beginning of the choral gloss upon it:

. . . .where a small crowd stood by an apartment house, a line of black cars by the curb,
And Anna explained that a young lady had died, they were going to carry her from the door to the hearse,
Thrilling Hershey because he thought the dead were naked and he wished to see a naked lady very much. But when the coffin was shouldered through the door to the hearse,
He was left there on the sidewalk intensely disappointed, and from that moment there, in the sunny May morning, waiting on the sidewalk,
Love and death have lain by each other in his mind, Eros and Thanatos, the beginning and the end, Romeo and Juliet forever composed!

"There are more things in heaven and in earth
Than any philosophy! And Death holds all.
We look up when we hear that word as one
Looks up to hear of his profession, his home town.
Or as all human beings when they hear
Of sexual intercourse!"
"Here Love and Death
Meet in a metaphor: love is a kind of death
On Venusberg, as Tristan might have said—"

and so on, for another page. Now, the little prose episode has a certain justness: one feels that a rather acute observation has been made on child psychology; but how the choral comment urges the point, hammers at the point, blasts the point! There is nothing very exciting in the the idea that love equals death; or if there is, Hershey has neatly made his point with Eros and Thanatos, Romeo and Juliet. But the Chorus, getting off to an all too characteristically bad start with the grammatical howler in the second line, contributes only one good thing, the idea that death is our profession, our home town; the smirk over sexual intercourse and the pretentious mis-location of Tristan (do the Ghosts mean Tannhaeuser?) on Venusberg are merely frills—and the Voices go on here to cite the Katzenjammer Kids, Huck Finn, Rousseau, and "September Morn."

From the very beginning, Schwartz has shown himself to be unusually conscious of the apparatus of learning. His early *Coriolanus and His Mother,* itself a variation upon an erudite theme, depended largely upon references, allusions, and the introduction of dead and living Great Figures; so did *Shenandoah;* and so does *Genesis.* But allusion is useful only when it illuminates; when it merely decorates, or, worse, when its function is narcissistic, it is a clog. Thus, when Schwartz writes "Fame is the vast infinity / Of noble and ignoble mind," the allusion is successful because in its context the parody of Milton's phrase cuts with sharp irony in at least two directions; but when he writes

By accident he saw her, looking down
—These accidents suggest a great abyss—
Unseeing, seen, as of *an sich,* true view!
How images may dominate a life!
So Freud has said; before him, Baudelaire

he has spoiled his perception by the gratuitous conscription of Freud and Baudelaire to support a commonplace. It is as though a man were to write

Each tomorrow follows hard upon
An anterior tomorrow, as the poet
Shakespeare said; and after him, E. Poe.

Freud and Baudelaire, to say nothing of An Sich!, are merely irritants in this thin context. And so many of these allusions occur in *Genesis* that one finally begins to wonder if the author is capable of any observation unsupported by authority. It is needless to say that he is; but the spatter of great names upon nearly every page, the copious quotation of foreign phrases, the irrelevant erudition*—all these go a long way towards drowning the many

*For example: "Capitalismus" occurs several times. But is this form preferable to "Capitalism," which has as many syllables in the event that the author was (improbably) vexed by metrical doubts? Or, to get down to cases, why not "Kapitalismus"? Or again, the Ghosts suddenly (and this once only) console Hershey in elementary French: "Calm, calm, poor boy, brimming and obsessed, *Tais-toi / Pauvre enfant!* endure your past as such: /No one, not God himself, can learn too much! / This is an education, *faute de mieux.*"

good things that he has to say. And if it be objected that I am insisting too much on particularities, that in dwelling upon the minutiae I am disregarding the over-all intention of *Genesis,* I can only say that I am in the excellent company of the Voices, and, since we certainly can take the Chorus as expressing the author's point of view, of Mr. Schwartz himself.

Finally, is the poet's intention sound? Yes, I think; but with qualifications. Hershey is a horrid little brat, and certainly he is far too sorry for himself, but he has been objectified, he has his own reality. He is thoroughly conscious of his ancient significance, of the incalculable importance of his role in the development of American civilization. He is a portentous symbol, and it is chiefly Schwartz's faith in him as a symbol that gives *Genesis* its precarious power. The prose staggers, the verse stumbles, the poem very nearly talks itself to death; but there is much insight here, much beauty, and a compelling honesty that seeks the core of things. *Felix*— as Mr. Schwartz is fond of saying—*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere caussas.* If I can't precisely say *Potuit,* I can at least affirm *Conatus est valdè*!

HAAKON M. CHEVALIER:

KLAUS MANN: *André Gide and the Crisis of Modern Thought.* Creative Age Press.

This book, and its subject, and the compulsion under which its author has written it are all, in a peculiar, almost paradoxical way, timely. More acutely and more disturbingly than any other writer of this generation André Gide poses the problem of the relation of thought to action. If many others, especially among the younger writers, seem in their work to be more directly challenged by this problem, Gide's personal drama, now reaching its end after a full and useful career as a writer and intellectual leader, makes his long struggle with it extraordinarily significant and illuminating.

The crisis of modern thought arises sharply out of the break in the continuity of the individualist tradition and out of the impossibility of carrying on, in the face of the contradiction between the reality of the present-day world and the heritage of western culture, modes of thought which, from Luther through Descartes to Nietzsche, were rooted in the primacy of the individual mind and conscience. And in Gide's life-work can be traced out progressively the difficult and confused path that leads from Nietzche and Dostoievsky to a future aesthetic and intimations of a new conception of man. Gide is perhaps the most complete living embodiment, among creative writers, of the traditional "man of culture," the man who comes nearest to representing for our time what Montaigne, Voltaire, and Goethe represented for theirs. Yet he has been increasingly concerned, not with assimilating and transmitting a cultural heritage, not with perfecting literary forms or creating masterpieces, but with the exploration of man's possibilities, with the search for a good life *hic et nunc.* With his ceaseless questionings and exhortations, his independence, his bold self-revelations, his nonconformity, his growing hostility to established institutions and his opening of new vistas, he is undoubtedly the outstanding writer of his generation whose work is affirmative and optimistic without being rooted in sleezy nineteenth-century liberalism.

This new study of Gide is for many reasons a remarkably good book. As the title promises, Gide's career and work are presented in the rich context of contemporary thought, and this is done here for the first time on something like an adequate scale. As a biography it is by all means the most comprehensive yet to have appeared. Many important facts of the writer's life here presented have never before been made public. Very few of his readers or critics knew that the woman to whom this self-confessed homosexual was married for over forty years was his one great love, that she was "his conscience and guardian angel"; nor that he has a daughter by another union. Mann clears up so many points in Gide's life that it is now really possible to see it as a whole, to fit the extreme contradictions into a consistent pattern. This documentation is interesting, of course, chiefly insofar as it has bearing on Gide's ideas and writings, This is not the

place to argue the relative merits of the purely aesthetic versus the biographical-psychological approach to a writer's work. The best study of Gide to date, a little known work by Jean Hytier[1] (Mann himself seems to be unacquainted with it), takes as its point of departure a remark of Gide's: "It is only by approaching it from the aesthetic point of view that it is possible to speak sanely of my work." Mann's method is to deal with each of Gide's work chronologically, tracing the growth of the ideas that successively found expression in them, showing how these ideas have become modified in the dynamic crucible of his own personal experience and under the stress of the events and intellectual currents of his times. Aesthetic criticism is given correspondingly less weight, though Mann's critical judgment is at all points finely balanced, sensitive and sharp.

But the specific virtue of this book, apart from its many objective merits, is more subjective. It arises, one may say, from the confrontation of his own personality with Gide's, and from their resultant interplay. Many factors contribute to making it a particularly moving document to appear at this time. The son of Thomas Mann—another great European—a creative writer in his own right, a German who as part of the young post-war literary generation came under the influence of the French writers of the time, a friend of Gide's, and an exiled anti-Nazi who has witnessed the tragedy of the breakdown of civilization, Klaus Mann was specially qualified to treat this subject and could bring to it unique insights. The story is told vividly, dramatically, with a deft handling of the abundant, complex material, the figures of real life moving easily among those of Gide's world—Mallarmé, Henri de Régnier, Pierre Louys, Oscar Wilde, Rainer Maria Rilke, Stefan George, D'Annunzio walking hand in hand with André Walter, Nathaniel, Ménalque, Michel, Lafcadio, Alissa, Eveline, Bernard, Olivier, Edouard . . . Dominating these is the figure of Gide himself, through its many metamorphoses: the repressed, overprotected child, the tormented adolescent, the passionate apostle of unrestrained freedom, the immoralist, the apologist of renunciation, the flayer of moral hypocrisy, the contemner of bourgeois justice and French imperialism, the classicist, the communist, and now the seventy-three-year old patriarch, still alert in mind and youthful in spirit, who in his own courageous, uncompromising way constitutes a powerful element of moral resistance to Nazi barbarism in what we must assume to be his virtual imprisonment in invaded France. Through Mann's affection and admiration his own quality and temperament shine forth. His portrait is now without shadows, and he does not hesitate to criticize sharply certain of Gide's writings and actions, particularly his two books, *Corydon* and *Return from the U.S.S.R.* As he emerges from Mann's account Gide is by no means Olympian. Human, all too human, rather, with his share of weakness and fallibility, but possessing also, aside from his superb gifts as a writer, a passion, a love of man, an inner integrity that seem bound to give him a very high place among those who have lived and worked to make men free.

"One must have all chaos within one," wrote Nietzsche, "to give birth to a dancing star." And when confronted by the luminous chaos of Gide's life and work, one has the feeling, more than ever today, that he pre-eminently among those of his generation stands at the threshhold of a new world, his eyes turned expectantly to the future. He is greater than any of his works, though it is in the sum of his works that he will live. One of the reasons, no doubt, why he is so little known, except as a name, by wide masses of readers, is that no one of his works, not even *The Counterfeiters,* gives anything like a full measure of the man. It may well be, as Mann suggests, that his Diary will become his best and most widely read book, for in it the artist and the man appear most fully, in their brilliance and complexity and warmth. Gide's greatness, I believe, lies not in any startling revelations which his work contains, in any solutions which he proposes for the problems of the artist, the individual or society, but rather in his having explored so thoroughly, so conscientiously, so honestly, the complete round of the basic perplexities that afflict the modern mind, ranging between the poles of thought and action, freedom and necessity, the individual and society, and in having pursued this endless quest in a spirit of adventure, of deep seriousness, and with an ineradicable faith in the possibilities of man's destiny.

1. *André Gide.* E. Charlot, Editeur, Alger, 1938. 226 pp.

Mann's book is not wholly free of blemishes, though these are indeed secondary. The most tragic aspect of the tragedy of Europe is that so many of those who were its victims, and among them particularly many intellectuals, have not yet fully comprehended what happened and why it happened. A cauterizing flame has passed over their souls, but not over their minds. Mann's version of the fall of France, as far as one can piece it together from his fragmentary account of it here differs not essentially from that of André Maurois, and presumably that of Reynaud and Daladier. On the critical side there is a number of evaluations with which many will take issue, though the quality of Mann's judgment is consistently high, and in so personal a book a certain trenchancy is a merit rather than a flaw. Mann's use of the English language is admirably fluent and resourceful. Careful proofreading, however, would have helped the book greatly, eliminating many slips in grammar and idiom, and especially correcting faulty quotations. On page 330, in the bibliography, André Maurois' *I Remember, I Remember* (O irony!) is attributed to André Gide.

MARIANNE MOORE:

Some Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin. Translated by Frederic Prokosch. New Directions.

For some of us it is not so much that Hölderlin is forgotten as that we have not known him, and James Laughlin has done us a service in issuing these twelve early lyrics with a translation by Frederic Prokosch,—the German facing the English. Even before turning to the poems, one is benefited by the reflected attitude of Mr. Prokosch in the biographical note,—his deep unintrusive gratitude lending verity to the statement that Hölderlin's worship of nature and passion for Hellas are penetrating and affirmative.

Hölderlin was born in 1770 and died in 1843. That his last thirty-six years of life were clouded by incurable—though harmless—madness, is in poignant contrast with the impression his work gives, of self-discipline, reverence, and exaltation.

Use of the Greek long syllable followed by three short syllables—"a place for all my grief"—indicates the ardor without bluster of Hölderlin's mind, and Mr. Prokosch in his version achieves the same modest directness. An indeed remarkable continuity, the eight stanzas "To Nature," as approximating the German, in accent, syllable, and rhyme:

> Often I lay lost in senseless grieving
> And the world's own fulness gathered me,
> As a river, after endless weaving,
> Winds at last into the open sea;
> I would hurl myself from the exhausting
> Solitude of time and come
> To the embrace of the everlasting,
> Like a pilgrim to his father's home.
> . . . . . .

There is an impassioned humility in the run-over ending, as where "gray" is separated from "clouds"—in the German—and "my" from "eyes." For these Mr. Prokosch provides an equivalent, if not the actual verbal transcript:

> .....on
> The dusky clouds.
> .....
> More clearly, more serenely, happy
> One, ...

We note also—in the lines "To Nature"—the modesty of the unindented rhymes.

The vibrant honesty of the work provokes an eager loyalty of disagreement. In the stanzas entitled "Man,"

.....; and soon he is fully grown; the beasts
Avoid him, knowing man for a different kind,

might one risk the more informal

.....; and he is soon full grown; avoided by the
Animals, who know that man is different; ?

Though the weighting of phrases in the two languages does not correspond exactly, something seems lost by altering the order of words in English from the order in German, and

Stillness of ether I understood,
But the words of man never.

suggests this possibility:

I understood the soundless air,
Human speech I could not grasp.

Sometimes one cannot have both the desirable word and the desirable rhyme, as where "Stoppelfeld" is not translated stubblefield because "gone" requires as rhyme "field of stone."

German word-masonry, with its accompanying sound harmony, defies translation, as Mr. Prokosch observes in his foreword. How talented his

.....and deep
To the current falls the brook:.....

for

.....in dem Strom
Tief fällt der Bach,.....

and

..... in the
Saintly sobering water.

for

Ins heilignuchterne Wasser.

Agree or disagree, one is benefitted; this is a valuable presentation—a Jacob's ladder for the heart that is not hard. Here is nature worship that we cannot resent; or to speak more exactly, the forces of nature embodying worship as set forth in the New Testament. At any stage of growth, "the heart desires too much"; but for Hölderlin, nature was not an intensive on nothing; it "made golden . . . a life of poverty." His nobility and capacity for renunciation met suffering as their proving-ground.

The initial lines of "Patmos" are in themselves a psalm of life:

Near, near and
Difficult to grasp is the Almighty.
Where the danger lies, there
Likewise lies the salvation.
In darkness dwell
The eagles; .....

The interpenetrating of literal and figurative,—"the massed summits" of the Alps, the peaks of existence, the dazzle of purity, the gulfs impassable to frail personality however close-gathered, the bridge disproportionate to the torrent, the thought of living water, the words "faithful" and "wings," with their overtone of "O that I had the wing of a dove,"—is incalculably magnificent. And the background is the foreground in its combined consciousness of Acts 17:27, Rev. 1:15 and 17, Isaiah 40:31: Near is the Lord "if haply we may find him." "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead, and his voice as the sound of many waters saying, . . . I am he that liveth"; "they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN:

SINCLAIR LEWIS: *Gideon Planish.* Random House.
JOHN DOS PASSOS: *Number One.* Houghton Mifflin.
RUTH McKENNEY: *Jake Home.* Harcourt, Brace.

Here are three novels about three American types. Two are by ranking American novelists, men of international prestige; the third is a first novel by a young woman whose previous work has been confined to funny sketches for *The New Yorker* and left reportage and journalism. All three are bad novels worth serious consideration. . . .

Of the three, *Gideon Planish* is by far the least important. Lewis is still resolutely writing in the Twenties, dredging up problems with the smell of mustiness on them. The new book "exposes" (even the word seems archaic) the fund-raising racket in the person of Dr. Gideon Planish, whom Lewis calls alternately, with traditional portmanteau cuteness, a "philanthrobber" and an "organizator." Planish graduates from professor of rhetoric to dean to lecturer for ladies' clubs, then to the fabulous world of the Association to Promote Eskimo Culture, the Dynamos of Democratic Direction, the Blessed to Give Brotherhood, and so on. On the way up he acquires a somewhat terrifying undergraduate named Peony as wife, an inside familiarity with the nether world of the Fund, the Foundation, and the Association, and a number of problems of conscience which seem to interest Lewis much more than they should the reader.

Reviewers have been splitting a number of their traditional gray hairs arguing how the new book ranks in Lewis' cavalcade of eighteen novels, whether it is a second-rate Lewis like *Dodsworth,* third rate Lewis like *Mantrap,* or even first rate Lewis like *Arrowsmith* or *Main Street.* This reviewer, who plowed through *Ann Vickers* and *Work of Art* but boggled at *The Prodigal Parents* and *Bethel Merriday,* can only report that it is quite as bad as any of the ones he has read, and perhaps a shade worse. Its form is burlesque, a delicate technique of remarkable subtlety and effectiveness when done well, but the rankest corn when it misses. Burlesque attempts to comment on reality by the broadest kind of caricature, using the devices of *reductio ad absurdum,* or showing how foolish the pseudo-gothic building looks by making an outhouse in the style, and "magnification," or showing the flaws in the phony dollar by enlarging it on a screen. Lewis plays these devices for all they are worth, and he can caricature just as broadly as the next man, but he lacks the basic necessity of successful burlesque, the constant focus on the burlesqued reality. There is little real indignation beneath all the aimless striking about, no true anger at what is going on.

Incidentally the book gives Lewis an opportunity to get in all sorts of sly blows: identifying the racketeering near-fascism he describes with his old enemy "liberalism," or doing a vicious (and quite funny) take-off on his ex-wife, Dorothy Thompson, disguised as Winifred the Talking-Woman. It even permits him to live off his own fat, as in referring to people as "Babbitts" (thus giving the accolade of the author's approval to folk usage) or dragging the Reverend Elmer Gantry into the action. But the book actually has nothing to say about Gideon Planish and his rackets, except possibly, "Isn't he an ass, but then aren't most of us?" and although Lewis remarks once or twice about the genuine menace of the Planishes to democracy, it is obvious that he is less concerned with the real world than with his own gay slapstick. He is still essentially the same small town atheist and smart-alec who stood up in a pulpit and dared the Lord to strike him down dead, and Babbitt is still his brother.

If *Gideon Planish* is burlesque, Dos Passos' *Number One* is straight parody. Dos Passos has taken the career of Huey Long, or at least the first installment of it, and broadened its outlines, toned up its colors, and in general made it cruder, funnier, and far from as frightening. Parody, as Pound used to maintain, can be the highest form of literary criticism, and his book permits Dos Passos, in a secondary work of fiction, to comment on the style and content of the primary work of fiction (indeed, of creative imagination) that Long made of his life. What spoils this promising project, very simply, is Dos Passos' preoccupation with a much less interesting subject, the life of another of his depressing Spotswoods. The current Spotswood, Tyler, is the worldly older brother of Glenn, the hero of *Adventures of a Young Man.* In the new novel he has become chief lieutenant and ghost-writer for Chuck Crawford, the "Number One" patterned after Long, and the book shows his progressive degeneracy and galloping paralysis of the will until Crawford finally betrays him with his own gutless connivance. He, rather than Crawford, is the focus of the book.

Now that the second panel of the Spotswood book has been completed (at least one more may be presumed) the outlines begin to emerge. Glenn Tyler in the second book is to show the equal hopelessness of either fascism or rabble-rousing politics (Dos Passos seems to see Crawford—and through him Huey Long—not so much a fascist as plain unscrupulous

American). The patness of this case has required a certain amount of "doctoring the books"; since Dos Passos seems to have sold himself on the "Ground We Stand On" between the last novel and this, he has been forced to rewrite Glenn. In the last novel Glenn died in Spain a martyr to his pure Marxist views, a little Communist who hated the official Stalin Communism and capitalist democracy with equal fervor (he didn't hate fascism half as much). In the new book he has been transformed, and his impassioned letter to Tyler from Spain, in defense of the good old American way, constitutes the core of Tyler's realization of his sin as well as of the author's "message." It reads in part:

> Tyler, what I started to write you about was not letting them sell out too much of the for the people and by the people part of the oldtime United States way. It has given us freedom to grow. Growing great people is what the country's for, isn't it? As long as the growth of people to greater stature all around is what we want more than anything, it will keep on. But we've got to make more and more of the promises come true. If we let too few kinds of people find space to grow in our system, nobody will believe in it any longer. If not enough people believe in a way of life, it comes to an end and is gone.

That passage is almost the measure of what has happened to Dos Passos. In *U.S.A.*, it would have been done tongue-in-cheek, as the characteristic meaningless string of platitudes it is; in the new book it is all that Dos Passos has to say. Along with this degradation of content from serious social thought to Fourth of July oratory, Dos Passos had suffered a complementary stylistic atrophy. The Camera-Eye is back, this time doing portraits of five of the "common people," but the style of the book has stopped being organic and become pat and forced (this is what Crawford never knew, see?) Words are still run together arbitrarily, and *Number One* has new and pointless typographic monstrosities that almost equal his classic old horror "beerrestaurants." The surface is still there, but there is increasingly little beneath it but a loud petulance.

Ruth McKenney's novel is sharply marked off from the other two on almost every count. It accepts where they reject, affirms where they negate, and "sings" (in the bardic sense) where they parody or burlesque. Her hero, to match Lewis' slimy fund-raiser and Dos Passos' degenerate rabble-rouser, is a superman, a Communist labor organizer whose strength is as the strength of ten. Jake Home grows up in a mining town, a child prodigy of superhuman ability and self-educated genius, and goes on to lead a violent mine strike, build and destroy a successful career in industrial management, organize the longshoremen in New York, almost save Sacco and Vanzetti single-handed, and end as the leader of the 1932 Unemployment Demonstration in New York, all by the time he is thirty-one.

The book is an obvious allegory, with Jake Home standing for the militant working class, the Communist party, or some combination of the two. Discussing the book in another magazine, soon after it appeared, I remarked that Jake's two unfortunate love affairs bore out this interpretation, since they were both obvious Temptation symbols, one of the middle-class, trying to seduce him into bourgeois respectability, and the one of the rich, trying to corrupt him with wealth. "All that is missing is the third of the inevitable triumvirate, the proletarian girl with whom he achieves true happiness at the end," I wrote. "And it is a tribute to Miss McKenney's intelligence and good taste that she had passed up that easy victory."

The compliment was hasty, however. Soon afterwards, a friend sent me an amazing and invaluable document, a long letter from Miss McKenney to the Communist *Daily Worker* answering their criticisms of the book and explaining her purpose. In it she reveals that *Jake Home* is only the first part of the book, and that Jake will undoubtedly get his nice proletarian girl in the sequel. "I would like to tell all my correspondents, whom I just can't answer separately," she wrote, "that I absolutely promise that Jake will have a happy marriage and even children to cherish!" Among the other information in her letter (which is, incidentally, vital reading for anyone seriously interested in the novel) Miss McKenney says: "Although I violently decry the use of symbolism in literature, necessity has forced me to make one or two incidents in Jake's life symbolic"—that is, of similar events in the history of the Communist Party. The only one she confesses to is Jake's "beating" in 1927 and his "turning away from the movement" for the next two years.

Whether Miss McKenney is aware of it or not, her novel is full of such symbols, and the whole affair is as flatly allegorical as *Pilgrim's Progress*. The women are symbols of class pulls; the characters are stock Vices and Virtues that tempt, resist, or aid militant workers; even Jake's giant stature and red hair are easy symbols. Miss McKenney may resent symbolism, as she resents all the technique of modern writing (witness her furious and gratuitous denunciation of Joycé in *Jake Home*), but perhaps unconsciously she has taken advantage of many of them, and writes better than she knows. The symbolic structure of the novel, for example, is a highly effective use of rebirth ritual, so that Jake progresses from new life, with each transition marked by the sacrificial death or symbolic destruction of a "guardian" image, in which Jake has invested his personality in that life. On the superficial level, the novel may be flat and unbelievable, with great chunks of what

Empson calls "pastoral," the glorification of common people for their "simple" virtues, but on the symbolic level it is a well planned and extremely effective allegory.

Miss McKenney at least has something to affirm. Both Lewis and Dos Passos attempt an affirmation; the former in Planish's daughter Carrie, a sound young girl who despises her father, and in Mr. Johnson, one of the celebrated "common people," who sits in on meetings of the executive committee of the Dynamos of Democratic Direction and finds them a pack of dangerous fools; the latter in his Camera-Eye working people and in the doctored-up Glenn. In both cases, however, the negation is too pronounced, and the form too purely one of rejection, for much that is constructive to come through. Miss McKenney is able to make a flat, even a somewhat primitive, total acceptance.

Lewis and Dos Passos are concerned with "priests," men with power and on the inside, but still fundamentally the servants of a higher being; thus Lewis uses Planish to get after much more sinister types like Colonel Marduc and Senator Bultitude, and Dos Passos uses Spotswood to reveal the really dangerous Chuck Crawford. Miss McKenney, on the other hand is dealing with the type of the "saint", the man who goes through temptations to achieve a higher purity and dedication, his loyalty to an ideal rather than a higher up.

All three books pay lip service to the "common people"; Lewis' and Don Passos' heroes "violate" them, Miss McKenney "expresses" them. Lewis and Don Passos are major writers on their way down, their books becoming increasingly inferior; Miss McKenney is a minor writer coming up. From Lewis nothing can be expected in the future but new caricatures, new "exposés" of stock types. Dos Passos will probably give us at least one more Spotswood book, rounding out a dreary trilogy, this one possibly celebrating the father, who seems to be the type of what Dos Passos wants to affirm. From Miss McKenney, we are due for the Further Adventures of Jake Home, and after that, it is to be hoped, better and less ambitious works. Both men have perhaps more talent than Miss McKenney will ever have, but the conclusion is inescapable that they have both somehow been left behind, while she at least has her eyes turned forward.

HAROLD N. HILLEBRAND:

WILLIAM VAN and MARY ALLEN O'CONNOR: *Climates of Tragedy.* Louisiana State University Press.

The purpose of this book is "to indicate the chief philosophical attitudes that have obtained, and must obtain, in eras of dramatic tragedy," in conjunction with "some of the philosophical attitudes that are death to tragedy."

The reviewer is puzzled and indeed shocked by the omission of Racine and the whole French classical "climate" (objectionable word). If this means that the O'Connors do not believe Racine to be one of the world's great tragic poets, then their capacity to deal with the subject is open to question. He is also troubled by the omission of Schiller and any consideration of Schiller's tragic aesthetic, which is important. In fact there are only two "climates" which the authors find to be favorable to great tragedy, the Greek and the Elizabethan. This suggests a prejudiced and doctrinaire view.

A reservation may be made similarly against their definition of tragedy. To admit into the fold only examples of tragic failure conforms to a modern way of thinking, but it is unhistoric. It means omitting from the canon such plays as *Alcestis, Iphigeneia in Taurica, Cinna* (along with *Polyeucte* and a good part of Corneille), *Maria Stuart,* and most of Maxwell Anderson. The field of tragedy is more diverse than the definition here accepted will allow.

Mr. O'Connor tells us in the Preface that the book was written "in a sense . . . . against a deadline," that is to say, military induction, by way of explaining such lacunae and such ambiguities as a reader might find. The reviewer thinks that with longer study, and after friendly criticism, many passages might have been strengthened or revised. For example, on pp. 97-98 occurs this passage:

> A false desire to shut out the unpleasant and ugly causes [one type of man] to exclude from consideration all objects which, as Addison puts it, are not "Great, Surprising, or Beautiful."
>
> Two distinct vistas, then, loom before the eyes of the inquirer into dramatic tragedy. There is a beauty that is the result of careful selection, the primrose minus the thorns, the blue sky and fleecy clouds minus the suggestions of jagged lightning and raucous thunder. The other vista holds the heterogeneous complexities of the everyday scene. Here one can see the toad sitting on the edge of a marsh

sunning itself, or hear the screech of the hoot owl on a clear night, or witness the funeral on a pleasant morning of the man who has died from cancer. The former is romantic [by what definition?] and a conscious reordering by the poet of the world he sees about him, the latter?—for want of a better term—is metaphysical and represents a refusal on the part of the poet to exclude experiences from his consciousness simply because they are unlovely. There is no absolute way of separating the two kinds of poetry.

In dramatic tragedy both types of poetry must exist, poetry of exclusion (emotional) and poetry of synthesis (intellectual).

To discuss fully the exceptions which might be made to these *obiter dicta* would take too much space. But one might begin by pointing out that what Addison would exclude from noble poetry is "the mean, the commonplace, and the ugly," an exclusion with which I am sure Aeschylus would have agreed. Then it appears that the two types of poetry employed by tragedy are the pretty and the realistic, certainly an extraordinary classification, which leaves no place for the sublime and which would go immediately on the rocks of any play by Racine. And finally it should be pointed out that "a conscious reordering by the poet of the world he sees about him" is fundamental in noble poetry of whatever age and "climate."

Nevertheless, within its limits of definition and in spite of its critical omissions, *Climates of Tragedy* says much that compels agreement. One can readily agree that an age which has lost its sense of the individual importance of man has probably lost its sense of tragedy; that a belief in a wise, orderly universe in which everything is for the best makes a tragic view impossible; that Christian dogma of an all-powerful and benevolent God cuts the ground from under tragedy (here the O'Connors would have found the two Biblical tragedies of Racine useful); that "tragedy is essentially noble reaction to suffering" (but this statement alone would admit to the canon *Polyeucte, Maria Stuart,* and *The Masque of Kings*); that naturalism fails because it is unable to "press back against reality"; that sentimentalism, romantic excess, and the scientific dogma of the happy life through technology are fatal. All this, and much else, is true; and even when one has the selfish pleasure of disagreement his thinking is stimulated.

KERKER QUINN:

EDWARD WAGENKNECHT: *Cavalcade of the English Novel.* Henry Holt.

"A bigger, more thorough-going book, telling more about the books and authors covered, than any other similar volume," is the publisher's boast, not altogether ill-justified, about this survey of the British novel from Elizabeth's time to our own. Some of the thirty chapters, which consume 550 pages and give measured attention to about seventy novelists, are perfunctory—for England has produced some staggeringly dull novelists; and sometimes the emphasis is disconcerting—de la Mare occupies a roomy chapter, but Forster, Huxley, and Maugham are housed in the appendix along with Ouida and Hall Caine. Yet, even with only ten pages apiece to spare to Fielding or Sterne or Jane Austen, Wagenknecht imparts information in vast quantities—probably ending many a teacher's search for a text for undergraduate courses in the novel. The extensive, up-to-date bibliographies and abundant footnote references will bring a temporary feeling of safety to graduate students engaged in feverish doctor's-oral preparation. And the non-academic reader who is eager for quick "background" will be grateful for the readable, unpedantic style.

In spite of being thus variously serviceable, *Cavalcade of the English Novel* is a disappointment, not a nightmare like A. H. Quinn's *American Fiction,* but by no means the one-volume history of the British novel which we dream of and wish one of our more gifted critics would have the patience to undertake—critics able to penetrate surfaces crusty with scholarly conformities, willing to make solid, and sometimes daring, revaluations. Wagenknecht, more than most chroniclers, has read the vast body of critical opinion intelligently, and he competently reconciles and synthesizes. But his attitude is too reverent, too protective—as when he fumbles at refuting Edwin Muir's explanation of Scott's failings or when he asserts: "If Romance is dead, says Mr. Swinnerton, Stevenson killed it. But it seems to many of us that he gave it, rather, a new lease on life." He is too dependent on the pronouncements of his predecessors. After reading direct quotations from three critics concerning Gissing's ideas, for instance, we feel it is time for Wagenknecht to express a judgment of his own. We find instead, remarks on Gissing's awkwardness in handling transitions and his failure to emphasize climaxes—remarks which the reader *ought* to be told are traceable to Swinnerton's *George Gissing* (1912) and have been repeated without elaboration in several books since. Such unacknowledged borrowings

sandwiched between direct quotations compel us to ask whether Wagenknecht's function is not more editorial than critical. Furthermore, how much perpetuation of evaluative misconceptions is fostered by this pasting-together method of building literary surveys? Is Gissing the victim of vague, unillustrated generalizations echoed, but not investigated, every few years? Perhaps the first writer to blame him for awkward transitions was prejudiced by a then fashionable and quite different manner of linking scenes; perhaps the Ur-critic of his unemphasized climaxes simply failed to appreciate a conscious, often effective device to achieve a kind of understatement or obliqueness. It could be.

There's no denying that the embellishment of *Cavalcade* is Wagenknecht's own, no use holding others responsible for the sober drollery (Hardy's Arabella is called "a creature compared to whom the wife of Bath, was an ascetic"), for the droll soberness ("Yet Hardy disliked being called a pessimist, and I think he was justified"), for the punctuation of critical passages with ironic biographical details ("And when the First World War came, his son was blown to bits"—Gissing again), for the comparisons and superlatives (Kipling "is a late-Victorian Defoe; he is the trickiest of all great writers. In their own way, his opening sentences are the most wonderful in literature").

Wagenknecht promises a companion book on American fiction. It will again be serviceable nd again be heralded by the publisher as a "fresh and rich treatment" and again be stuffed with easy answers to the bloomer-girl triplet questions, "What is the author trying to do?" and "How well does he do it?" and "Is it worth doing?" The chronicler will be too busy to ask, "What am *I* trying to do? How well am I doing it? Is it worth doing the way I'm doing it?"

COLEMAN ROSENBERGER:

DAVID CORNEL DE JONG *Across the Board.* Harpers.

AMOS N. WILDER: *The Healing of the Waters.* Harpers.

HAROLD ROSENBERG: *Trance Above the Streets.* Gotham Book Mart.

All three of these books, although two of them are the author's first books of poems, are in the nature of Selected Work. Wilder's volume is frankly so: his recent work is accompanied by poems chosen from his two earlier volumes—the first of which, *Battle Retrospect,* was published in the Yale Series of Younger Poets two decades ago. De Jong, author of the critical study, *The Spiritual Aspects of the Poetry,* 1940, exhibits a conmagazine publication. *Across the Board,* made up of some fifty poems, includes no more than one-fourth of those available in the magazines. Rosenberg, too, has published widely and well in magazines, but has brought together here only the poems which he feels are of most lasting interest. Being considered selections, then, the three books are rewardingly mature, and may be judged by exacting standards. Otherwise they have little in common.

Wilder, who is professor of New Testament Interpretation at Andover-Newton (and author of the critical study, *The Spiritual Aspects of the New Poetry,* 1940), exhibits a consciously religious body of work. He writes upon specifically religious themes, and upon secular themes from a religious point of view. That good poetry can be written from such a preposession has been amply demonstrated in the past; perhaps good poetry can again be written from such a prepossession in our time. Wilder's failure, and it seems to me that he misses rather widely, may be only a personal one. The spiritual values are present, but the poetry is pedestrian.

De Jong's poetry is more able as poetry and more satisfying, even in spiritual values in my opinion, to the reader. It is smooth, it is always skilful, and at times it posesses qualities of genuine excitement.

Rosenberg's poetry is the most cerebral of the three. He employs a surrealistic technique which is effective, if at time his images seem too deliberate and calculated. All of his writing will have particular interest and value for other poets, and a more general response will be evoked by an occasional poem of simple lyrical beauty—like "Spanish Epitaph":

O tall men of Hades,
Have pity on this little one!
His speech was not formed yet.
All he knew of life was laughing and crowing,
Till the iron horse dropped on him out of the sky.
O gaunt horses of Hades,
He has not even one weapon
With which to defend himself!

CALVIN WOLF:

JEAN MALAQUAIS: *Men from Nowhere.* L. B. Fischer.

This novel, Malaquais' first, appeared in France in 1939 with a fanfare by André Gide and won with Renaudot Prize (awarded by a group of Parisian critics). In *The Counterfeiters* Gide said of the naturalist school of writing, "The great defect of that school is that it always cuts a slice of life in the same direction: in time, lengthwise. Why not in breadth? Or in depth? As for me, I should like not to cut at all." It is in this respect—in Malaquais' way of preserving the wholeness and plasticity of his character while viewing them in all dimensions—that he surpasses most American naturalists. He achieves a fuller reality in relating character to background.

In Java, a mining village in Provence, are gathered some two hundred of the castoffs of Europe. Without passports or identification papers, still dazed from the first war, they have a hard time of it in the world. We see them through the camera-eye working, drinking, lying, whoring, and dreaming, as they wait to be sucked into the whirlpool of a second war. Always, though whether the scene be one of romance or of violence, there is a quiet sharp wit and an almost cynical casualness in the author's presentation. So all the small dramas of the book go on, until finally the authorities order the mine closed . . . ."After that, well, there's nothing more to be told . . . . They had gone off . . . . these restless vagrants . . . . and around the gurgling fountain they had left a memory of their excommunication like so many ghosts revisiting as vampires the haunts of their active life."

There's a marvelous prologue (a piece of writing worthy of Hemingway at his best) in which the author encounters on the street a ragged youth, who later may become any one of the inhabitants of Java. The youth is about to shove off for parts unknown—to escape into the outside world which, he is convinced, " . . . must be such a swell place . . . big and new." The world is a cage, replies the author: "As long as the cage is there, you can't get through the bars . . . . you've got to break it open, smash the whole system of constraints . . ." What follows, then, is simply stacking up of evidence for his thesis. It is here that Malaquais approaches the world of Henry Miller, who, at about the same time, was writing, "The great mass of men, destined now to suffer more cruelly perhaps than man has ever suffered before, have become paralyzed with fear, have withdrawn into their own shell-shocked souls, and neither hear, see, nor feel, except in relation to the daily needs of the body . . . The body has lost its relation to the world in which it moves. It is in this way that a world dies."

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